

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**PATTERNS OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN GHANAIAN  
TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF INNOVATIONS IN  
INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES**

**BY  
ESTHER ASENSO-AGYEMANG  
(ID. NO. 10330068)**

**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA,  
LEGON, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR  
THE AWARD OF PHD IN SOCIOLOGY**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY  
OCTOBER 2020**

## DECLARATION

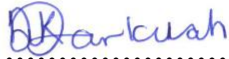
I hereby declare that except for references to other people's works, which have been duly acknowledged, this thesis is the result of my research produced at the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, under the supervision of Prof. Akosua K. Darkwah and Dr. Peace M. Tetteh.

I take full responsibility for all errors and omissions therein.



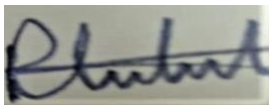
.....  
**ESTHER ASENSO-AGYEMANG**  
**(CANDIDATE)**

**DATE: 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2021**



.....  
**PROF. AKOSUA K. DARKWAH**  
**(PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR)**

**DATE: 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2021**



.....  
**DR. PEACE M. TETTEH**  
**(CO-SUPERVISOR)**

**DATE: 13<sup>th</sup> August, 2021**

## ABSTRACT

This study pays attention to how Ghanaian transnational families build and maintain close bonds over changing communication technologies. It highlights the tensions and conflicts that ensue and the broader pattern of the interactions given context-specific factors - gender relations among spouses, generational relationships among parents and children, migration induced class structure and the legal status of migrants. The objectives are situated in the relevance of socio-cultural context in patterning both technologies and transnational life. The constructivist grounded theory, which privileges the co-construction of research knowledge given the multiplicity of reality, situated in a processual context, was employed as the qualitative methodology for the study. Data was gathered through interviews, non-participant observation, and a review of relevant secondary data sources on YouTube and Facebook. Participants, located primarily in Ghana, were selected through snowballing, purposive, and theoretical sampling. The data gathered in Ghana were corroborated with insights gained from interactions among some Ghanaians in Vienna, Austria and Düsseldorf, Germany. Overall, sixty-one of them were interviewed across the study areas. The data were analysed using a thematic network analysis framework which proposes organising the themes from the data along three succeeding networks based on the degree of relationships.

In making sense of the data, the study drew insights from multiple perspectives – 'transnational social fields', constituting families through systems of practices, and a synthesis of technological determinism and social construction of technology. The findings indicate that transnational families choose different ICT mediums to interact with each other depending on the type of care performed – material, non-material, and the fulfilment of various trusteeship obligations. How specific ICT mediums fulfil the care obligations produces 'high-end and low-end techno bonds'

among transnational families. The bonds are also sustained by the exchange of remittances, where one's migration status determines the mediums through which they are exchanged. Migrants, mainly regular migrants, have greater leverage in determining which formal and informal remitting channels are used than non-migrants and irregular migrants. This observation reveals the economic privilege of migrants, even though not all migration projects results in economic advancement. Through their various usage of voice, video, and text-based mediums, several needs and obligations are met and thus emphasises that families can be functional even when they are not spatially bounded. One of those needs is managing their nostalgia, as the physically separated relation becomes emotionally close.

However, the heightened emotional arousal caused by the proximity is further complemented with occasional visits and therefore provides the balance that sustains the transnational experience. The inability of irregular migrants to visit home adds to the precariousness of their transnational experiences. As transnational families use the various communication technologies, tensions and conflicts arise, which are patterned by the technological epoch and the nature of the kinship bond and hardly by one's legal migration status. Given the prohibitive cost of using the limited available technologies in the old technological epoch, the primary tension of transitional families was the sparsity of interactions. In the current epoch, the commonplace nature of communication technologies promotes surveillance and transnational freeloading. The nature of surveillance practices varies among different categories of kin. Therefore, it is pursued with varying interests, including rooting children in the homeland by parents, promoting the exclusivity of sexual rights among couples based on gendered cultural norms that put wives in the spotlight, and limiting the abuse of trusteeship obligations among extended relations.

Lastly, the study found that the benefits and constraints of technologically mediated social interactions generate an overall, '...always on, but off...' pattern that underscores the ability of families to determine through their ICT mediated practices who counts as family and who doesn't. The study's findings affirm the literature on the Janus-faced experiences of ICT mediated social interactions among transnational families. Also, additional Ghanaian specific contextual factors, such as the prevalence of 'community surveillance' as against private surveillance reported in some context such as Senegal; and how the culture of indirection is elicited to manage the intrusion of current technologies provides new insights to the literature. The study provides recommendations based on the findings and conclusions.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Wisdom Kwadwo Asenso-Agyemang and Lucy Eunice Opoku, for their sincere love and commitment towards my education, especially in my formative years. Also, to my three ladies, my younger sister and nieces - Margaret, Martha, and Mabel- provided various support to me at home, giving me enough room to complete the thesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis is a culmination of the support and guidance that I received from several persons who deserve special mention and appreciation. First, I extend my gratitude to all the faculty and staff of the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, for the various ways they have contributed to this academic journey. Their contributions came in as course instructors, as people who offered intellectual insights during departmental seminars and conferences, as mentors keenly interested in my academic progression and as diligent administrative support staff. To my supervisors, Prof. Akosua K. Darkwah and Dr. Peace M. Tetteh, I am grateful for all the encouragement, patience, guidance, and help in making sure the thesis progressed and got completed at last! Prof. Akosua K. Darkwah deserves special mention for providing the drive and, in many ways, bent over backwards to me to keep me on track. Your kindness is deeply appreciated and worthy of remembrance!

I am also grateful to the faculty, staff, and colleague PhD students of the Department of African Studies, University of Vienna, for the academic and social support extended to me during the period of my three months student mobility, from November 2018 - January 2019. I thank Prof. Adams Bodomo for providing supervisory oversight on the thesis during the period, and his wife, Mrs. Mary Bodomo. She made my stay at the Department a memorable one. Prof. Dr. Kirsten Rüter also deserves special thanks for her keen interest in my work. I appreciate the contributions of my colleague PhD students – Katharina Gartner, Immanuel R. Harisch, Dominik Frühwirth, Martina Anissa Strommer, Victoria Owusu-Ansah, and several others, to the thesis at the peer review meetings. Thank you also for the other forms of support you extended to me during the mobility period.

To my PhD colleagues at the Department of Sociology, Mavis Akuffobe, Jane Aku Geraldo, and most of all, Diana Amoni Ntewusu, I appreciate the academic and social support I received from all of you throughout our four-year period. Your help made the arduous PhD journey a bearable one. Thank you so much!

Further, I am grateful to all the study participants in Ghana and abroad for granting me the privilege of entering their lives at the fieldwork stage. I wish to particularly thank my community liaison person during the fieldwork at Nkoranza, Mr. Ofori Brenya. The Registrar of the Nkoranza traditional council, Mr. Appiah, and all the staff of the Nkoranza-south municipal assembly deserve special mention for their support throughout my fieldwork period. I cannot forget the kindness of Mr. Oscar von Rooy and his family, Mr. Franz Haslinger and family, Mr. Hayford Boateng, and the other members of the English-Speaking United Methodist Church, Vienna, for the warmth and friendship during my short stay in Vienna. I also appreciate my friend, Magdalena Pac, for hosting me when I visited Düsseldorf and making the necessary arrangements to meet with some members of the Ghanaian community. Also, to Ishmael Boampong Osei, thank you for your support during the fieldwork phase.

The Building A New Generation of Academics in Africa (BANGA) Project of the Carnegie Corporation and the Erasmus Plus International Mobility Programme for non-European Union students provided financial support for my fieldwork and mobility. Without these financial inflows, I would not have been able to expand the scope of the fieldwork as I did. I am therefore very grateful for the support. Lastly, I am thankful to Ibrahim Mamudu and Mr. Nicholas Appiah-Danquah, formerly of the Department of Economics, University of Ghana, for the many ways they supported me throughout this journey. All praise and glory are to God, my heavenly Father!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES/MAPS.....</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>xiv</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Problem and Objective of the Study .....	3
1.3 Significance of the Study .....	6
1.4 Definition of Concepts.....	7
1.5 Outline of the Study .....	10
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Changing Family Forms and Practices .....	14
2.3 From Migration to Migrant Transnationalism .....	22
2.4 Transnational Family Interactions over Changing ICT – Media, Gendered, Class, and Generational Perspectives .....	28
2.5 ICT and Society: Insights from Technological Determinism and Social Construction of Technology Perspectives.....	37
2.6 Conclusions.....	43
<b>CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH APPROACH .....</b>	<b>45</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	45
3.2 Philosophical Assumptions – Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, Methodology .....	45

3.3	From Grounded to the Constructivist Grounded Theory Method .....	48
3.4	Sampling Approach .....	50
3.5	Study Areas.....	55
3.6	Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis.....	60
3.7	Ethical Considerations .....	65
3.8	On Reflexivity .....	67
3.9	Limitations of the Study .....	72
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DETERMINANTS OF ICT PREFERENCE.....</b>		<b>73</b>
4.1	Introduction.....	73
4.2	Caring through the Exchange of Remittances .....	75
4.3	‘High-End Techno-Bonds’: Care among Relations with Affective Bonds .....	84
4.4	‘Low End-Techno Bonds’: Care among Relations with non-Affective Bonds .....	94
4.5	Conclusion .....	101
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS IN TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTIONS IN AN EVOLVING ICT LANDSCAPE.....</b>		<b>106</b>
5.1	Introduction.....	106
5.2	Older Technological Era – Sparsity of Interactions.....	109
5.2.1	Letters and Cassette Recordings .....	109
5.2.2	Fixed Lines – Payphones, Personal Telephones and Communication Centres ....	113
5.2.3	A Peek into a Communication Centre – Account from a Former Manager .....	116
5.3	New Technological Epoch – Regular and Heightened Interactions .....	121
5.3.1	Surveillance.....	123
5.3.2	Transnational Freeloading .....	140
5.4	Summary and Conclusion.....	144
<b>CHAPTER SIX: “ALWAYS ON... BUT OFF...”: PATTERN OF TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTIONS WITH CURRENT ICT .....</b>		<b>147</b>
6.1	Introduction.....	147
6.2	WhatsApp: Technology Facilitating an “Always on ...But Off...” Pattern.....	150

6.3	When “Always On” .....	154
6.3.1	The Socially Adapted Gaze of Communication Technology .....	155
6.3.2	Closely-Knitted Interactions – Social Adaptation to Multimodal Contact.....	159
6.4	When “Off” .....	167
6.5	Summary and Conclusion.....	171
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS...</b>		<b>174</b>
7.1	Introduction.....	174
7.2	Summaries of Major Findings .....	177
7.3	Conclusions.....	184
7.4	Recommendations.....	187
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>		<b>189</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, UG ..</b>		<b>202</b>
<b>APPENDIX II: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS .....</b>		<b>203</b>
<b>APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANT.....</b>		<b>206</b>
<b>APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW GUIDE – MIGRANTS ABROAD.....</b>		<b>208</b>
<b>APPENDIX V: INTERVIEW GUIDE – NON-MIGRANT RELATIONS .....</b>		<b>210</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES/MAPS

	Page Number
Figure 3.0: Thematic Network Analyses of Patterns of Interactions -----	65
Figure 4.0: Maps of Ghana's 2G, 3G and 4G Mobile Network-----	89
Figure 6.0: Photo grid of WhatsApp Functionalities-----	151

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page Number
Table 3.1: Migration Effectiveness Ratio for Each Region -----	52
Table 3.2: Gender and kinship disaggregation of in-depth interview participants -----	54
Table 3.3: Educational Level of In-depth Interview Participants -----	59
Table 3.4: Kinship and Country of Migration Composition of Matched Sample -----	61

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GP&T-----Ghana Post and Telecommunications Company

GSS-----Ghana Statistical Service

ICT----- Information Communication Technology

IOM----- International Organisation for Migration

NELM-----New Economics of Labour Migration

PSTN----- Public Switched Telephone Network

SCOT-----Social Construction of Technology

UK----- United Kingdom

UN DESA----- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

USA----- United States of America

VOIP----- Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

Although not a new phenomenon, migration has received increased research attention due to its heightened scale in recent times. In 1990, the international stock of immigrants was 153 million, which formed 2.9% of the population. The 1990 stock of immigrants contrasts with 2019, which stood at 271.6 million at a rate of 3.5% of the population (UN DESA Population Division, 2019). In absolute terms, the stock of migrants in 2019 represents a 77.5% increase over 1990. However, the proportion reduces when one accounts for population growth over the period.

Despite the increased number of migrants, some micro and structural factors make it challenging to migrate whole families – acute for immigrants from developing countries (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2016). The factors at the structural level include tighter visa regimes, nationalist apprehensions on security and employment as the number of immigrants increase, and geopolitical policies on migration. At the micro-level, socio-cultural practices that encourage fostering, especially in West Africa, also provide incentives for parent(s) to migrate while leaving children behind (Dankyi, 2011; Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985).

Moreover, in cultures where separate living arrangements for married couples is a norm, living apart across national borders may be a choice (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2016). Further, when migration is seen as a life cycle investment to boost households' investments portfolios, as espoused by the New Economics of Labour Migration literature (see, for example, Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999), families may decide on who should migrate and who should be left behind.

Additionally, as part of their growth phases, families go through periods of separation, which may be occasioned by migration. Also, the globalisation of labour and the preferences for particular social classes, particularly the middle and upper classes in some social contexts (Charles et al., 2008), necessitate the geographical separation of families occasioned by migration.

These macro and micro factors combine to create transnational families. A transnational family is formed when a particular family is spread across different national borders but consciously maintains enduring ties using communication and transportation technologies (Levitt, 2001b). This phenomenon of transnationalism extends the definition of familial interactions beyond the traditional instantaneous face-to-face interactions.

Rapid technological improvements in mass communication and transportation have shaped the process of migration and the levels of interactions between migrants and their families in their originating countries (Baldassar et al., 2007; Horst, 2006; Vertovec, 2004; Wilding, 2006). These changes are most evident in, for example, the speedy flow of information on remittances and their usage, long-distance parenting and intimacies, monitoring and control of distant significant others in a gendered and generational context, decision-making, and other forms of social interactions (Adiku, 2017; Dankyi, 2011; Hannaford, 2015; Madianou, 2016; Mahler, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). Technology makes it possible for families to be 'here and there' simultaneously (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003). Caarls and Mazzucato (2016), for example, found in their study of Ghanaian couples living apart in Ghana and two other European countries that some of the couples do not have future reunification plans. The couples can visit each other and also interact as often as they wish on the phone. The lack of future reunification plans implies that transnational family life is increasingly desirable in contemporary times. Therefore, it must not be assumed to be an anti-

thesis to the assimilation of migrants into their receiving countries, but rather a simultaneous process that needs much research attention.

These dynamics engendered through technological innovations and advancement in transportation infrastructure have transformed the configuration of space in both sociology and migration discourses. Consequently, these dynamics have led to an increasing focus on transnationalism (Levitt, 2005; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). In spite of this increased attention, academics have not adequately emphasised the fact that the experience of transnational family life is not even. Transnational family life is mediated by some context-specific socio-cultural variables that necessitate an expansion of its academic focus to different socio-cultural zones. Further, as the daily interactional practices of transnational families are aided by technology, there is the need to pay more research attention to how the technologies are used to reproduce familiar patterns of social interactions and, at the same time, new context-based peculiarities that may arise.

This study, therefore, intends to become part of recent scholarship that rescues African migrants from the image of labour migrants who invade more prosperous economies to pursue working-class lifestyles to supplement their families' incomes back home. It especially pays attention to how they do family life transnationally through communication technologies (Mai & King, 2009; Morgan, 1996).

## **1.2 Research Problem and Objective of the Study**

Large volumes of studies exist to show how transnational families use communication technologies to build and maintain their familial bonds (Adiku, 2017; Baldassar, 2007a, 2008; Benítez, 2012; Bray, 2008; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Hannaford, 2015; Horst, 2006; Madianou, 2016;

Mahler, 2001; Tazanu, 2015; Wilding, 2006). Several interesting findings have been presented by these studies that demonstrate that the use of ICT increases the emotional closeness of families (Baldassar, 2007a; Madianou, 2016) in ways that enrich their transnational experiences. These experiences are produced as a result of the increasing development and availability of communication technologies. The tremendous growth in mobile communication technologies and the internet in the early 2000s revolutionised interactions among transnational families (Vertovec, 2004). This epoch introduced the hybridity of media through which families connect and stay in touch at a relatively low cost. These less expensive means of staying in touch, as Vertovec (ibid) highlights, are the 'social glue' that bind long-distance families together. Adiku (2017, p. 176) illustrates this by highlighting the response of a male participant in her study of Ghanaian transnational couples:

We keep in touch using these technologies because we believe that doing so will prevent uncertainties from setting in. So we don't feel like we each do not know what the other is up to. Really we don't talk about anything specific. It is not like it [the chatting] is for a purpose. It is just the how are you doing? What are you doing? What have you been up to? Stuff like that.

Also, migrant mothers can bridge the spatial separation between themselves and their children to provide various forms of long-distance mediated care such as guidance, material support, and emotional care with communication technologies (Parreñas, 2005). Conversely, the disruptions caused by ICT use in transnational families have also been given some academic attention. Accounts of heightened tensions in relationships when ICT is used to monitor and control the actions of significant others, such as migrant men policing the activities of their wives, have been emphasised (Hannaford, 2015), emphasising the gendered nature of transnational interactions. These notwithstanding, it has also been noted that ICT complements other forms of social and political processes in shaping the interactional lives of transnational families. For example, the

increased closeness of the use of ICT engenders is linked to the ability of families to visit each other as often as possible and the political processes that either enable or restrain those visits (Baldassar, 2007a, 2008). This implies that one's experience of interactions in a transnational family is tied to the context in both their origin and destination countries. Movement within zones such as the European Union that have established political treaties to promote migration, employment, and settlement produce transnational experiences markedly different from moving from the global south to the global north (Anderson, 2017; Baldassar et al., 2007). Given this, there is a need to extend the scholarship on transnational family studies to account for the various conditions that shape their outcomes.

Additionally, ICT infrastructure that facilitates transnational interactions is unequally available. Despite the explosive growth, there are inequalities in access and service quality (Castells et al., 2007). Developed regions of the world have greater access to ICT resources; unlike those in the developing regions and within developing regions, access is further patterned by rural-urban bias. Further, the use of ICT is transformed by socio-cultural norms such as the meanings of privacy (Elul, 2019), generational gap (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Tapscott, 2009), and other micro-level modes of adaptation. Because of these dynamics, transnational family studies should account for how unequal resource availability and different socio-cultural norms shape the myriad ways ICT is used to influence social interactions.

These notwithstanding, the available literature on ICT use in transnational families encountered in the African context focused primarily on couples (Adiku, 2017; Hannaford, 2015) with few diversities in the sample. This limited focus on families is despite the salience of the extended family in Africa (Nukunya, 2016; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012) and the increasing prominence of

irregular migrants from Africa. This study, therefore, seeks to add to the existing literature on migration in broader terms and more narrowly on transnational families by focusing on:

- How ICT mediates and shapes the processes through which regular and irregular emigrants in a rural and an urban Ghanaian setting maintain ties with their families - both nuclear and extended. The study also pays attention to how gender, age and income levels further shape ICT mediated interactions among transnational families.

This focus is a vast departure from the mainstream literature on migration that views migrants from developing countries like Ghana as solely profit-seeking agents with little or no emotional ties to their families in their countries of origin (Adiku, 2017; Mai & King, 2009). Therefore, the current study proceeds from recognising that families in the Ghanaian context comprise more than spouses and their children and include relations such as uncles/aunties, nephews/nieces, siblings, and grandparents. Given the preceding, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What influences one's choice of use of particular ICT in transnational interactions?
- How do these technologies engender peculiar forms of tensions and conflicts in transnational families?
- In what ways do innovations in ICT pattern social interactions in transnational families?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study is evident in the research gap it addresses – to highlight some salient Ghanaian contextual factors in shaping the interactions of transnational families. This study, therefore, extends the global scholarship on transnational families and ICT usage through a Ghanaian lens. The focus is achieved by highlighting the extended family's influence, the growing incidence of irregular migration, and how these salient factors intersect with other socio-cultural

variables such as generation, gender, and income to determine the patterns and outcomes of the interactions. In recent times, irregular migrants in Ghana have gained more academic attention (Darkwah et al., 2019; Kleist, 2017). This category of migrants is faced with different levels of precariousness that influences how they interact with their families back home. As the study focuses on the transnational experiences of regular and irregular migrants, it introduces additional nuances to the literature.

#### **1.4 Definition of Concepts**

The under-listed concepts used in the study are defined to situate them in context.

**Transnational Families:** The concept of transnational families is related to three other vital concepts; migration, families, and transnationalism. Thus, to arrive at the definition of the term, I provide clarifications on what the three related terms mean. Migration as a concept is shrouded in many debates. These debates highlight the politicisation of migration. Specifically, it is used to stratify, racialise, and control others, notably labour migrants from developing countries. Thus, when labour moves from developed to developing countries, they are often referred to as expatriates or technical aid and not migrants (Anderson, 2017; Anderson & Blinder, 2015; Bacchi, 2009).

Nevertheless, the concept of migration entails movement from one's place of habitual residence to another - whether internal or external. The movement could be voluntary or involuntary, regular, or irregular. The concept also embodies a time dimension, distinguishing migration from short term mobility (Anderson & Blinder, 2015; GSS, 2014; Kok, 1999). The specific period to classify as short-term varies. However, I adopt the time-span by the Ghana Population and Housing

Census, which puts long-term migration at a time-span of six months or more (GSS, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. When people migrate, there are generally two possibilities that arise. First, they may seek to establish a 'permanent'<sup>2</sup> stay, or secondly, return home after a short period of stay. When they intend to establish a permanent stay, they are usually referred to as emigrants by their home regions and immigrants by their destination regions. The primary focus of the study would be on Ghanaian emigrants as their length of stay would offer the needed dynamics central to the objectives of the study.

Transnationalism as a conceptual tool in migration studies was developed by critiquing other prevalent concepts such as assimilation, integration, and multiculturalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992a; Glick Schiller et al., 1995). In this study, it is defined as the micro-level regular and enduring ties between emigrants and their relations in their home countries propelled in contemporary times by advances in transportation and communication technologies. These ties are embedded in power structures and inequalities, leading to various transformations in the receiving and destination regions (Levitt, 2001b; Lima, 2010). Given the dense exchanges in the transnational space, migration is jointly experienced by those who move and those who stay put (Levitt, 2001b). This collective migration experience accounts for why the term transnational families is given preference to 'transmigrant' deployed by Glick Schiller et al. (1992a) to emphasise the national boundaries crisscrossing interconnections and activities by immigrants. Although transmigrant underscores a transnational perspective, its usage connotes a migrant centred approach to the transnational experience. Conversely, the study takes the perspective that both

---

<sup>1</sup> The Ghana Population and Housing Census defines an emigrant, based on the time span, as someone who has lived outside his home country/region for a minimum of six months.

<sup>2</sup> Permanent stay is a fluid concept as insights from diaspora and transnational studies emphasise that the idea of place, shifts both spatially and relationally (Levitt, 2005; Anderson & Blinder, 2015)

those who migrate and those who remain in the homeland are integral in understanding the transnational experiences.

Family is related to kinship and marriage but beyond that refers to practices, identities, and relationships constituted to form bonds of relatedness (Finch, 2007; Morgan, 1996) rather than on fixed entities that are impressed on individuals based on the Parsonian model. Transnational families, as used in this study, refer to the regular and sustained practices, identities, and relationships that tie emigrants and their relations back home in networks of relatedness enabled by transport and communication technologies and structured by macro and micro levels constraints.

The fact of migration reconstitutes families (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Manuh, 1999; Pribilsky, 2004), and thus, transnational families are markedly differentiated from families whose members are spatially bounded. However, migration does not change the categorical outline of families as nuclear or extended, at least at the macro level. A number of studies that focus on transnational family practices have elaborated on how extended relations such as grandparents (Asima, 2018; Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007) are actively involved in the care of their adult children and their grandchildren, whether in the homeland or as occasional visitors to the destination regions. Therefore, the concept of transnational families as used in this study includes both nuclear and extended families.

**Information Communication Technology (ICT):** The concept of ICT is a broader application of information technology (Neves & Casimiro, 2018). Information technology appears to have been used first by Leavitt and Whisler (1958) in their essay on its influence on businesses in America. They defined IT as

...composed of several related parts. One includes techniques for processing large amounts of information rapidly, and it is epitomised by the highspeed computer. A second part centers around the application of statistical and mathematical methods to decision-making problems; it is represented by techniques like mathematical programming, and by methodologies like operations research. A third part is in the offing, though its applications have not yet emerged very clearly; it consists of the simulation of higher-order thinking through computer programs. (<https://hbr.org/1958/11/management-in-the-1980s>, accessed 27<sup>th</sup> August 2020)

Communication Technology (CT), as used by Rogers (1986, p. 2), is 'the hardware equipment, organisational structures, and social values individuals collect, process, and exchange information with other individuals. Therefore, the use of "ICT" in this study includes but is not limited to technological devices such as landlines, mobile phones, the internet, social media, language in its various forms – written, oral – employed for various purposes such as social interactions and transfer of resources. Communication technologies and ICT are used interchangeably in this study.

## **1.5 Outline of the Study**

The study is organised into seven chapters. In this first chapter, I set the tone for much of what happens in the following chapters of this study by situating the study in context. The second chapter on the review of relevant literature surveys the extant academic work in transnational family studies and the place of technology in different societies. Additionally, the chapter provides insights into the theories that serve as the basis for this study. The third chapter highlights the approaches used in gathering the data for the study as a prelude to the presentation of findings in the next three chapters.

Technologies mediate social interactions among transnational families. Given the current plethora of technologies for any interaction, these families must decide which ones to choose any time they interact. Chapter four then presents the first set of findings and discusses the factors influencing

particular communication technologies for social interactions among transnational families. As the interaction proceeds, they demonstrate inevitable tensions and conflicts embedded within the hierarchies of relationships and the peculiarities of transnational social life. These include the technological mediation of interactions and the multiple spaces in which they take place. These tensions and conflicts become the focus of chapter five. The last chapter about findings, chapter six, gives an overview of the more or less stable outcomes that emerge when one pays attention to the aggregate patterns of interactions among transnational families. As the study's concluding chapter, Chapter seven summarises the significant findings and presents significant additions of the study to the existing literature. The chapter also provides recommendations for the consideration of various social actors – policymakers, individuals, and communities.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This study falls within three main domains of academic research – family studies in sociology, the multi-disciplinary fields of migration studies, and science, technology, and society studies. Thus, this review pays attention to these three disciplines, drawing on key literature related to the study's focus.

With a focus on transnational families, I review literature on Western and African families that position families in a state of flux. Changes in contemporary families in the West have been conceived of as characteristic of the 'late modern' (Giddens, 1991; Giddens, 1992), 'liquid society' (Bauman, 2000), and 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). These various characteristics define structural level changes in contemporary (Western) societies in the post-industrial era – an era defined by the rise of the service industries and the decline of agricultural, extractive, and manufacturing sectors. The changes have an enormous influence on the structures of the social fabric, including marriage and family life, which are highlighted in the chapter. Despite these broad-based changes, patterns of families in the West are not uniform (Chambers, 2001). Thus, I also pay attention to micro-level empirical studies that establish continuities between contemporary family forms and that of the past, in spite of the noted structural changes (Baldassar et al., 2007; Charles et al., 2008).

In Africa, particularly Ghana, contemporary families' shape has been influenced by what Mazrui and Levine (1986) term as 'triple heritage' of traditional African cultures, Arabic/Islamic culture,

and European/Christian culture. These three factors of change are further shaped by contemporary ones such as modernisation, urbanisation, and migration. These changes, therefore, position family forms in Africa as an embodiment of all these far-reaching, diverse, and sometimes contradictory changes (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007). I thus highlight these forms of changes that affirm and at the same time challenge the structural accounts (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Heaton & Darkwah, 2011; Karanja, 1994; Manful & Cudjoe, 2018; Nukunya, 2016; Takyi, 2003; Takyi & Gyimah, 2007; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012).

The structural account of family studies shapes an understanding of how macro-level factors influence actions at the micro-level. However, they are by no means adequate in accounting for the myriad family practices and forms. I, therefore, highlight the perspective on family studies espoused by Morgan (1996) and show its relevance for this study. The outline of the review is to highlight the importance of spatial and temporal influences in shaping an understanding of family forms and changes.

In the field of migration studies, I also review literature that tracks the development of the conceptual focus on 'transnationalism' (Glick Schiller et al., 1992a; Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Levitt, 2001b; Lima, 2010; Portes, 2001, 2003; Vertovec, 2009). The crux of the shift from immigrants to trans-migrants is that migrants do not sever their ties to their homelands. Instead, they engage in dense networks of relationships and exchanges with their relations back home. Given this, I provide an overview of the literature on how the dense networks are (re)produced with ICT. ICT serves as a vital tool that connects migrants and their networks in their homelands (Adiku, 2017; Baldassar, 2016; Benítez, 2012; Bray, 2008; Hannaford, 2015; Horst, 2006; Madianou, 2016; Mahler, 2001; Parreñas, 2003, 2005; Vertovec, 2004; Wilding, 2006).

To bring the Ghanaian transnational families' context into the spotlight, I pay attention to an overview of migrant transnational experiences in Ghana and its contemporary forms, highlighting literature that reveals the various precursors and trajectories of migrants (Adiku, 2017; Awumbila et al., 2015; Coe, 2011, 2017; Darkwah et al., 2019; Manuh, 1998, 1999, 2011; Mazzucato, 2009, 2015; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Mazzucato et al., 2006). In view of the densities of the exchanges and interactions, the experiences of migrants are seen as co-created and shared by those who migrate and those who stay behind. Thus, I highlight the importance of geopolitical, socio-cultural, and others in shaping the transnational experience.

The review also pays attention to science, technology, and society studies given the central place of technology in influencing interactions among transnational families (McLuhan, 1994/1964; Postman, 1992; Sacasas, 2020; Silverstone et al., 2005; Sismondo, 2010). This focus is centred on theoretical insights to make sense of the findings of this study. Broadly, the field is marked by three theoretical perspectives that have had an enormous influence on the contemporary appreciation of the place of technology in society -'technological determinism', 'social constructivism', and 'actor-network theory' with a fourth growing perspective known as the 'post-humanist' theory (Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018). The theoretical focus of the study blends insights from both the technological determinism and social constructivism perspectives. These two perspectives are therefore elaborated in the final sections of this review.

## **2.2 Changing Family Forms and Practices**

Contemporary marriages and families are markedly different from past periods (Chambers, 2001; Charles et al., 2008; Cheal, 2008; Cherlin, 2004). Marriages before the 1960s were characterised by a heterosexual couple who remained married to each other throughout their adult lives. Such

marriages had clearly defined gender roles, where the woman was seen as the home-keeper and the man as the breadwinner (Cheal, 2008; Friedan, 1963; Nukunya, 2016). The marriages were marked by stark inequalities between men and women, with the women and the children from the union regarded in some cases as the property of the men (Giddens, 2011).

In contrast, contemporary marriages and families are rooted in changes that have occurred at the structural level, which though varied, is conceptualised as characteristic of late capitalism, which has led to increasing individualisation (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992). The weakening of social norms and values that regulate family life is the primary cause of the individualisation of the family. Consequently, this individualisation has contributed to deinstitutionalising family life and practices (Beck, 1992; Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Other factors are noted to be the root cause of the deinstitutionalisation of the family. One of these is the increasing opportunity for women to work outside the home. Working outside the home has minimised the economic dependence of women on men (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1992).

Another factor responsible for the deinstitutionalisation of the family is situated in the mass production and services orientation of late capitalism, leading to 'liquid modernity' - a metaphor used in this context to describe the transience of social bonds and relationships (Bauman, 2000). The transience of social bonds and relationships brings with it two extreme tendencies of freedom and security. On the one hand, freedom enables individuals to choose to enter and leave various relationships at will. On the other hand, the growth of expert services on how to improve one's social relationships points to an increasing desire for security, which is undermined by the overemphasis on freedom (Bauman, 2000).

An additional cause of the deinstitutionalisation of the family is the commercialised and consumption-centred nature of contemporary romantic relationships (Illouz, 1997). Here, intimate relationship is commoditised and therefore seen to have a useful life, after which it must be replaced rather than repaired (Bauman, 2000). Further, advances in fertility and birth control have redefined the purpose of sexual intimacy to include more than just procreation (Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992). Lastly, there is a pervasiveness of risk – such as high divorce rates – leading to a reflexive desire to choose to minimise risk, which causes some persons to remain single or delay marriage (Beck, 1992).

Given all these far-reaching changes, marriage and family forms in the West have been transformed in many notable ways. These transformations manifest in various ways, some of which are emphasised. First, there is the growth of cohabitation among couples. Second, there is also an increase in same-sex unions/marriages, unlike the heterosexual unions that predominated in the past. Third, there is an increasing rate of childbearing outside marriage. Fourth, the transformations also manifest in the changing division of labour in the home. Finally, there is a high prevalence of divorce, remarriages, and reconstituted families and the enactment of laws and legal provisions to support these changes (Charles et al., 2008; Cherlin, 2004). Giddens (2011, p. 34), therefore, remarks that:

marriage and the family have become what I termed ... shell institutions: they are still called the same, but inside their basic character has changed. In the traditional family, the married couple was only one part, and often not the main part, of the family system. Ties with children and with other relatives tended to be equally or even more important in the day-to-day conduct of social life. Today the couple, married or unmarried, is at the core of what the family is.

Further, the norms that guide the practice of family life have also been noted to be private and situated at the micro-level (Cherlin, 2004; Giddens, 1992). The privatisation of family norms

allows families to determine what works – a situation that has given rise to 'pure relationships' (Giddens, 1992). Giddens (1992) uses the concept of 'pure relationships' to describe relationships characterised by active trust and democracy, where emotional communication becomes a central focus that binds or breaks the family/marriage. These relationships are thus not externally structured but constructed by the individuals that compose them through communication that reveal the inner self of the other. Cherlin (2004, p. 848) emphasises the implications of the privatisation of family norms on family life by highlighting that:

when social change produces situations outside the reach of established norms, individuals can no longer rely on shared understandings of how to act. Rather, they must negotiate new ways of acting, a process that is a potential source of conflict and opportunity. On the one hand, the development of new rules is likely to engender disagreement and tension among the relevant actors. On the other hand, the breakdown of the old rules of a gendered institution such as marriage could lead to the creation of a more egalitarian relationship between wives and husbands.

Hochschild and Machung (2003) have argued that the revolutionary idea of egalitarian relationships has been stalled. As they point out, 'women changed rapidly but the jobs they went out to and the men they came home to have not changed – or not so much. As a result, marriages bear the brunt of the tensions borne out of this "stalled revolution"' (p. xxi). The reality of a 'stalled revolution' highlights the various ways in which the structure of work outside and within the home remains largely inelastic to the changes occurring through the participation of more women in the public labour force. In the domestic sphere, women still have to grapple with the domestic division of labour structure, which gives them a greater burden of childcare and housework (Charles et al., 2008; Hochschild & Machung, 2003). They also shoulder a greater burden of care activities such as attending to an infirm relative and, in some instances, suffer abuse from men at home due to the unequal power relationships (Cusack, 2009; McKie, 2005).

Further, several empirical studies on family life and practices have challenged the assertions of individualisation and deinstitutionalisation of the family by highlighting the various ways in which traditional family practices persist in spite of the sweeping social changes of ‘late modern societies’ (Baldassar, 2007b; Baldassar et al., 2007; Charles et al., 2008; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012). Charles et al. (2008) did a restudy of an original study conducted in the 1960s in Wales, United Kingdom, in their bid to provide a comparative perspective on the degree of changes that have taken place in families over time. They observed that the bond between families – including extended relations – is maintained even though they noted fluid patterns of sexual partnerships. The findings of the restudy are summarised below:

What our findings show, however, is that in the midst of all this change, there is considerable continuity in family practices and that it is through these practices that families continue to provide their members with support and a sense of belonging. This happens not only when members of extended family groupings live in the same place but also when they are dispersed geographically, often over considerable distances. Extended family networks therefore endure through space and over time and are reinforced through the exchange of support, visits, and rituals which are engaged in together (Charles et al., 2008, p. 227).

These findings are consistent with Baldassar et al. (2007), whose study was conducted among Australian-based transnationals and their respective relations in Italy, Netherlands, Ireland, Afghanistan, Singapore, and New Zealand. As with Charles et al. (2008), they also found that families – both nuclear and extended - continued to maintain various types of care – moral, emotional, varieties of practical and financial care - in addition to occasional visits, in spite of their geographical separation. They further observed that the care exchange was situated in constraints of personal capacity, obligation, and negotiated commitment. The notions of obligation and negotiated commitment contrast the afore-highlighted pattern of the privatisation of family norms and therefore challenge the individualisation thesis.

Further, the central importance of extended relations, particularly grandparents who become active in their adult children's lives when they give birth, makes the conceptual focus on pure relationships espoused by Giddens (1992) more theoretical than empirical. Also, the concept of the 'traditional family' appears as a romanticised label that obscures the myriad differences among families in different social contexts (Chambers, 2001; Cheal, 2008). In the words of Chambers (2001, p. 3), the family is represented in a way that shows "persistent privileging of white ethnicity and the regulation of heterosexuality and patriarchy through family values." Thus, despite the noted ideal that in the traditional family, women were homemakers and men were breadwinners, working-class families and families in non-Western contexts have had women actively engaged in work outside the home (Cheal, 2008; Clark, 1994, 1999). Darkwah (2007) highlights the central importance of work outside the home to women in Ghana. She notes that these women see the drive to work as embedded in its instrumental value of positioning them to augment the family income and the intrinsic joy derived from working.

The push-backs on the structural accounts notwithstanding, some studies on the transformations of marriage and family life in Ghana have also drawn on structural changes to account for changes in Ghanaian families (Heaton & Darkwah, 2011; Manful & Cudjoe, 2018; Nukunya, 2016; Takyi, 2003). Particularly, there have been noted patterns of an increasing breakdown of the extended family system in favour of the nuclear family. These changes are fuelled by urbanisation and formal education (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Nukunya, 2016). Urbanisation limits the extent to which individuals feel constrained by certain normative patterns as they become removed from the 'mechanical solidarity' (Durkheim, 1984) of traditional collectivistic societies. Formal education also becomes a Westernising project that 'normalises' Western values and ideals among non-Western individuals (Assimeng, 1997).

Further, religious influences, particularly, Christianity have transformed traditional Ghanaian families. Whereas Islam, given its practices of polygyny, child fostering, and communal living, underscores some fundamental patterns of the traditional family in Ghana, Christian beliefs and practices have brought about tremendous transformations (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Major influences wrought by Christianity include the preference for monogamy over polygyny (Heaton & Darkwah, 2011) and the salience of the nuclear family over the extended (Nukunya, 2016). In Christian doctrine, there is increased emphasis on the importance of leaving the family of origin to cleave to the family of procreation. The emphasis on ‘leaving and cleaving’ increases the preference for neolocal residential arrangements for married couples in contrast to traditional forms such as duolocal, matrilocal, and patrilocal arrangements (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007).

An additional basis for the increasing popularity of the nuclear family is economic hardships that challenge the extent to which the reciprocal principle that organises social life among families can be realised (Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007; Manful & Cudjoe, 2018). Because of economic hardship, intergenerational care among families has now shifted from extended family to couples, siblings, and children (Aboderin, 2004; Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2007). Further, economic hardship also breaks down the influence of traditional centres of power in the family, which gives otherwise disempowered groups like women and younger children the ability to exercise their agency without restraint (Darkwah et al., 2016; Pickbourn, 2011). One of the noted ways the agency is expressed is to migrate to centres of opportunities without the consent of parents or husbands, thereby challenging the notion of the nuclear family as a spatially bounded unit. Darkwah et al. (2016, p. 22) highlight this emerging reality by quoting Amina, a female adult they interviewed, who emphasised that “they [the elders] are not doing anything about it [migration of young women]

because they are also swimming in the pools of poverty, they cannot provide their heart's desires when these people ask for it, hence, they have to allow them to go.”

While the foregoing accounts of non-Western structuralist perspectives on changes in family forms and practices have some empirical grounds, some of the key factors accounting for the changes have also been challenged. First, despite the religious influences limiting polygyny, contemporary marriages have also demonstrated patterns that undermine the assumed religious underpinnings. The patterns include - emphasising serial relationships for women; the informalisation of marriages where formal rites required to legitimise the unions are sometimes stretched over long periods; and the recourse to concubinage (or mistresses) by men (Coe, 2011; Nukunya, 2016). The practice of concubinage is known in the popular discourse of Ghanaians as ‘side-chics’. Thus, Karanja (1994) highlights that the transformations in marriage patterns have led to ‘private polygyny’, where the monogamous preference is publicly practised while in private and sometimes clandestinely, some men resort to polygyny.

Second, the norm of reciprocity, even though challenged by economic hardship, has not waned. In some cases, one's kin is willing to offer support even though they understand that the person being supported may not reciprocate (Kleist, 2017). In some other instances, the expected support can be provided in non-monetised ways, such as running errands or providing care and other forms of services (Mazzucato, 2009; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012).

The apparent difficulties in adopting a structural perspective on studies are important given the confounding counter-narratives. In this sense, Morgan (1996) shifts the focus of family studies from structural perspectives to the agency of actors by arguing for what he calls “family practices.” This focus highlights the fluidity of family patterns constrained by the prevailing structures of

society. It also emphasises how different people do families and centres on the agency of actors rather than structures in families (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Therefore, focusing on how people ‘do’ families privileges context and show how socio-cultural, spatial, political, and economic factors impinge on the families. Thus, this study highlights how Ghanaian families live in different nation-states but keep enduring ties with each other ‘do’ families through ICT. The focus begs an elaboration of the migration and transnational context, a topic to which I pay attention in the following sections.

### **2.3 From Migration to Migrant Transnationalism**

Migration plays a central role in the formation of human societies. From antiquity to the modern era, bands, empires, and nations have been formed through the migration of individuals and groups (Boahen, 1975; Harari, 2014; Hatton & Williamson, 1998; Solimano, 2010). In spite of the central importance of migration, individuals cannot always determine where to migrate and when, as the processes involved are controlled by macro-level policies as much as they are by micro-level factors.

Given the poles of individual agency and structural constraints or enablers, Morawska (2001) advocates for a “structuration of migration” model where due cognisance is given to both ends of the pole. On the structural constraints, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, which are major destination regions for contemporary international migrants, have been very influential in patterning migration flows through their migration policies. These policies since the post-war period are broadly categorised into three - the

classical model, the colonial model, the guest work model. A fourth model – illegal forms – is spearheaded at the micro-level to respond to structural constraints (IOM, 2019; King, 2012).

Nations that adopt the classical model construct their national identity as ‘immigrant nations’ and promote immigration as an active part of their national life. An example is the United States, through its policy of the Diversity Lottery Programme. In the colonial model, imperial powers promote emigration from their former colonies. Examples of such nations are France and Britain. Countries like Germany use the guest worker model to invite various professionals who may never be given citizenship status.

On the illegal forms, their pathways are varied, with routes from North Africa across the Mediterranean sea to Europe and through the illegal crossing of the USA/Mexico border from Mexico to the USA being popular (Castles et al., 2012; IOM, 2010). Sending regions also influence the degree of emigration through various policy frameworks. In the Philippines, for example, where migration is pursued as a pivotal tool for economic development, the government has put in place a favourable policy framework that enables the citizens in the diaspora to commit in various ways to the development of the country and also for labour to move to mainly the West for employment (Asis, 2008; Battistella, 2012; Chong, 2018).

The various commitments to migration from sending and receiving countries and migrants and their networks have led Castles and Miller (2009) to label contemporary times as an ‘age of migration’. The label is at the backdrop of the recognition of the acceleration, globalisation, feminisation, broadening and politicisation of migratory processes. However, when there is a shift of perspective from mobility to immobility, there is the salient need to question why in spite of the ‘age of mobility, 96.5% of the world’s population is immobile (UN DESA Population Division,

2019). Thus, the classical explanation of migration, popularised by (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889) in what has been known as the ‘pull-push’ factors, falls short of a comprehensive understanding of migration. According to the ‘pull-push’ thesis, labour mobility responds to perceived favourable conditions in the destination regions and unfavourable conditions in the origin regions (Ravenstein, 1885, 1889). Explicating from this thesis, then, people who live in economic backwater countries should be overwhelmingly mobile while those who live in advanced economies should be less mobile. However, the reality is far from the deduction from the thesis as labour also moves from the developed countries of the Global North to the developing countries in the Global South in the form of technical aid (Todaro & Smith, 2012). Further, the immobility thesis also confounds the key arguments of the ‘pull-push’ model.

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) model in accounting for labour mobility extends the ‘pull-push’ thesis by moving the unit of analysis from the individual to the household. Thus, according to the NELM model, migration is one of the strategies deployed by households to diversify their risk by building additional income portfolios from, for example, agricultural income (Stark & Bloom, 1985; Taylor, 1999). Return migration is conceptualised as a successful outcome of the migration project, particularly when the objectives have been met. The conceptualisation of return in the NELM model contrasts with the ‘pull-push’ model, where migration is seen as linear and return implied to be a failure of the migration project (King, 2012).

The NELM model has, however, been criticised particularly by feminist scholars for conceptualising the household as an arena where unitary decisions take place, thereby overlooking the various contestations, conflicts and acquiescence that household decisions engender (Chant & Radcliffe, 1992; Darkwah et al., 2019; Rodenburg, 1997). In summarising the feminist critique of how households, as constructed in NELM discourses, Chant (1998, p. 8) highlights that:

a ... critical contribution from feminist researchers has been the call to reject the idealised notion that households are unified entities in which members collaborate on an equitable basis for common interests. Instead, deconstructing the household and investigating its internal workings reveals that households may be more accurately depicted as an “uneasy aggregate of individual survival strategies”, and resources”, or a “locus of competing interests, rights, obligations.

Empirical studies on migration-related decisions of households support the feminist critique as migration decisions are not always a unified household decision. These studies reveal that wives sometimes resent the migration of their husbands but do not have the power to influence their actions (Darkwah et al., 2019; Hannaford, 2015; Mahler, 2001). Additionally, younger women and wives sometimes migrate without the consent of their parents or husbands (Darkwah et al., 2016; Pickbourn, 2011). In some other instances, where young men perceive the risk involved in their desire to use irregular routes to migrate, they collaborate with community-level migrants’ networks and keep their families in the dark on their plans for fear of rebuke and discouragement (Darkwah et al., 2019).

The historical-structural and the network models are other notable explanatory frameworks for the causes and patterns of migration. The historical-structural model employs a Marxist interpretation of capitalism and the development of underdevelopment. In the model, migration is seen inherently as drawing exploitative labour from developing to developed nations (Morawska, 2012; Piore, 1979; Sassen, 1991; Wallerstein, 1979). While being essentially deterministic and blind to the agency of migrants, the historical-structural model provides insights into how migration reinforces already existing systems of inequality and exploitation.

The network model, on the other hand, places migration at the centre of networks composed of chains of individuals who are connected and facilitate the processes and outcomes of the migration project by sharing vital information and other resources (Arango, 2004; Boyd & Nowak, 2012;

King, 2012; Mabogunje, 1970). The network model promotes an appreciation of circular, multi-causal and interdependent migration processes that account for different migration projects and help determine future patterns, as networks are self-reproducing.

The model also helps distinguish between the precursors of migration; how it becomes entrenched and spreads through time and space (Boyd & Nowak, 2012; King, 2012). Therefore, the network model gives a more nuanced view of migration but fails to position social networks as social capital, which may be exclusionary. Additionally, the model presents all networks as valuable resource bases, thereby overlooking the various chains of human trafficking networks that perpetuate abuse, illegal activities and violence.

The proliferation of various models on migration shows the difficulty in adopting a singular perspective as an overarching explanatory model for migration. Van Hear (2010, p. 1535) emphasises that such a plethora of models could be celebratory by commenting that “there is probably still a little appetite for a single theory of migration in the research community – indeed the ‘fragmented set of theories’ can be read as a strength in the diversity of approaches that characterise Migration Studies.” There is now a transnational turn in migration studies that presents an epistemological shift in the field. This shift moves the focus of migration studies from broad-based causal explanations that are largely quantitatively aligned to experiences of migrants that are more qualitatively aligned (King, 2012).

The transnational perspective, in some ways, draws on all the afore-mentioned causal accounts on migration but centre its focus on experiences. Migrant transnationalism, a perspective popularised from the early 1990s, focuses on sustained and enduring networks of relationships and exchanges (Faist, 2004; Glick Schiller et al., 1992a, 1992b; Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004;

Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2009). The exchanges include ideas, resources and practices – between migrants and their relations that crisscross the borders of any given nation-state. The transnational lens builds largely on the network model of migration but focuses primarily on the experiences and transformations those networks engender. Given its focus on experiences, it has challenged how the experiences of migrants are conceived in their destination regions through integration and assimilation approaches. Traditional perspectives on the integration and assimilation experiences of migrants are conceived as being exclusive, and thus, migrant transnationalism becomes an anti-thesis. By employing the concept of “simultaneity”, for example, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue that migrant transnationalism and assimilation are not “binary and incompatible.”

The transnational focus also challenges social scientists, in general, to extend the methodological focus of social science research beyond the nation-state in a critique labelled as ‘methodological nationalism’(Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). Given the increasing interconnectedness of contemporary times spearheaded by the proliferation of communication and transport technologies, the nation-state, although salient, cannot be the only arena of social life. Thus, the nation-state must not be the only container of society in social theory. The transnational gaze links migrants’ place of origin and destination together through relationships and exchanges. The exchanges are dense and thick that migration experiences are not only borne by migrants but also by those who remain in the homeland (Levitt, 2001b). Further, the relationships and exchanges are noted to transform both the receiving regions and the sending regions by reconstituting gender relationships, class, the nation-state and other forms of identities while at the same time being constrained by them (Levitt, 2001a; Levitt et al., 2003; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Lima, 2010).

The transnational approach has not been without criticism, including the fact that the transnational experience is not new (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004); that the term has been used too loosely and

therefore lacks any relevance (Barkan, 2006). Also, transnational experiences are claimed to be seen everywhere, but there are very few migrants who engage in sustained and enduring exchanges with networks outside their destination regions (Portes et al., 1999). Further, the influence of the nation-state cannot be minimised despite globalisation (Chernilo, 2006). These critiques notwithstanding, the transnational perspective has influenced a large volume of empirical research on migration that traces how migrants and their relations back home construct their various migration experiences. The analytical sphere of such empirical studies has been situated at the macro, meso and micro levels.

In the following section, I pay attention to the extant empirical studies that situate the transnational perspective at the micro-level of familial relationships, focusing on how the outcomes of the relationships are enabled or constrained by ICT. The focus on ICT highlights the necessity of problematising how transnational families as spatially and temporally separated family units live their interconnected lives in spite of their separation.

#### **2.4 Transnational Family Interactions over Changing ICT – Media, Gendered, Class, and Generational Perspectives**

Studies on transnational families from almost a century ago indicate that communication among families continued despite geographical separation (see, for example, Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918). However, the forms and means these families interact have differed over time given innovations occasioned by developments in Information Communication Technology (ICT). Newer forms of these technologies present profound and multiple ways of staying connected.

Some empirical studies on ICT usage among transnational families have noted the progress in ICTs and the opportunities and constraints each epoch of innovation brings to users (Baldassar, 2007a; Baldassar et al., 2007; Mahler, 2001). The earliest of such innovations mentioned is letter writing. Despite the ability to keep letters received over long periods as a form of external memory stock, some users of these services had to contend with illiteracy and delays in sending letters through traditional postage services. These notwithstanding, forms of resilience were expressed through the hiring of letter writers and audiotapes, which brought about the extra cost and sometimes loss of privacy. Over time, new layers of communication media were invented, such as telephones, phone booths and much later mobile phones and the internet (Baldassar et al., 2007; Mahler, 2001; Silva, 2018). In the era of the ascendancy of the telephone, families relished the instantaneous exchanges it afforded and the added thrill of communicating via voice. However, telephones were not widespread, especially in developing countries, given the cost of building the needed infrastructure to support its operations (Castells et al., 2007; Vertovec, 2004). Thus, one had to join long queues to use a telephone booth or schedule a convenient time to receive a call on a designated telephone handset where calls were made in the presence of others. These constraints on accessing telephones limited the privacy of the communication. Additionally, the amount of time spent communicating had to be balanced with consideration for others in the long queues and the costly nature of telephone calls then.

The explosive growth in mobile communication technologies and the internet beginning in the early 2000s revolutionised interactions among transnational families (Castells et al., 2007; Vertovec, 2004). This epoch introduced the hybridity of media through which families connect and stay in touch at a relatively cheap cost. Madianou (2016) uses the term “ambient co-presence” to emphasise the constant awareness of the involvement of distant significant others in one’s day-

to-day affairs. The attention and participation are made possible through multiple communication media such as Facebook, Skype and WhatsApp. These cheap means of staying in touch, as Vertovec (2004) highlights, are the ‘social glue’ that binds long-distance families together.

The literature emphasises some benefits of this increased ability to connect with distant relations. The ability to stay constantly in touch with each other, for example, has been noted to reduce mistrust and prevents what Mahler (2001) termed as ‘transnational imagination’ – the suspicion of the infidelity of spouses in transnational families. Additionally, communication technologies in their contemporary forms promote high levels of emotional bonds among transnational families through the varied and heightened mediums of interacting – voice, video, text, among others (Baldassar et al., 2007). Further, contemporary communication technologies also facilitate material forms of care, such as sending and receiving remittances (Parreñas, 2005). These forms of enhanced contact relationships have brought about the ability of migrants to be ‘here and there’ (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003), a concept used to denote how technologies of communication enable migrants to stretch their lives simultaneously between their destination and origin regions.

Conversely, some tensions and inhibitions in transnational family arrangements are also heightened with contemporary communication. These constraints are linked to the kind of relationship under consideration, the particular medium of communication, the gender and generation of actors in the relationship, and other broad-based contingent socio-cultural factors. The constraints linked to the communication medium arise given the tendency for non-human material artefacts to gain agency. These artefacts, termed as vibrant matter by Bennett (2010), impinge on their use by humans. For example, mobile phone handsets may freeze and become unresponsive. Batteries may run down without the ability to recharge immediately; internet connectivity may fluctuate and influence the smooth flow of conversations. Additionally, each

communication media platform has limitations that may influence its usage. Text-based platforms, for instance, give a form of co-presence that is active but may also be intermediate, selective or discretionary as responses to messages are subject to the discretion of the individual and may not be immediate (Madianou, 2016).

Further, recourse to non-verbal cues in communicating meanings and intentions diminishes when communication is mediated by technological artefacts (Adiku, 2017; Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007). This notwithstanding, Madianou and Miller (2012a) emphasise that all communication is mediated. Therefore, face-to-face communication where physical co-presence is established is also mediated through language, biases, cultural perspectives, social roles, among others. However, there appears to be an increased admiration for physical co-presence in communication, often stated to be the gold standard (see, for example, Collins, 2004). This admiration should be understood in the broader frame whereby social change processes are often analysed by anchoring the dominant status quo.

Transnational relationships are further constrained in some other gendered ways. Even though ICT usage in transnational families brings married couples together and sometimes allows virtual sex, sexual gratification, especially for men, is often constrained (Adiku, 2017). Also, wives who remain in the homeland sometimes become apprehensive of the transnational experiences when their desire for physical intimacy with their partners remain elusive despite increased virtual interactions and material care (Darkwah et al., 2019). These experiences of husbands and wives in transnational families demonstrate that sexual gratification is severely challenged among transnational couples. However, migrant husbands have more social leverage to infidelity than their wives who remain in the homeland (Hannaford, 2015; Mahler, 2001; Pribilsky, 2004). The

community gaze constantly polices women who remain in the homeland to conform to socially desirable norms on gendered fidelity.

Additionally, the gendered patterns of migration, where married women mostly stay put as their husbands migrate, introduce reconfigured practices of gender relations among couples that may be constraining and enabling for both husbands and wives at the same time. Pribilsky (2004), in his study of Ecuadorian transnational families, found that when husbands migrate, some wives take on the roles of their husbands and therefore participate increasingly in the public life of their communities through work and other social obligations. While at the same time, migrant husbands are confronted with traditionally feminine roles such as cooking and cleaning in their destination regions in the physical absence of their wives. These reconfigurations of gender roles become avenues for interactions among transnational couples. For example, husbands call their wives for guidance on how to prepare a meal or what ingredients to buy (Pribilsky, *ibid*).

Conversely, in Senegal, Hannaford (2015) found that when husbands migrate, the public presence of their wives is severely constrained. In the Senegalese case, the social script for propriety for married women is to avoid unnecessary contact with other men, especially in their husbands' absence and keep a low public profile. Thus, husbands use communication technologies to ensure that their wives are not set loose against their interests (Hannaford, *ibid*).

In Ghana, when husbands migrate, wives who stay behind wish that their transnational living arrangements would not prolong beyond their expectations. However, some wives find that the extended relations of their partners undermine their interest, a phenomenon which Darkwah et al. (2019) captioned as 'good for parents but bad for wives...'. The caption embodies competing expectations from the migration of sons/husbands in a context where the lineage bond is central

and, in some cases, elevated above the marital bond (Nukunya, 2016; Oppong, 1980). Following from Darkwah et al. (2019), mothers or extended relations in general privilege the livelihood outcomes of migration above emotional and physical intimacy. In general, wives and nuclear relations also give as much importance to the livelihood outcomes of migration and their need for emotional and physical intimacy with their partners. Therefore, their interactional relationship with their partners abroad is normalised when a desirable balance between their two needs are met. In instances where the desires are unbalanced, the interactional lives of the couple suffer, with prolonged periods of no contact or tensed interactions (Pribilsky, 2004). Given the foregoing, Mahler (2001, p. 610) concludes based on her study of transnational couples in El Salvador that ‘gender organizes the many-stranded transnational social field on multiple levels’. Also, as gender relations are socially constructed, the manifestations of gendered interactions among transnational relations are context-specific. This, therefore, highlights a rationale for emphasising gendered transnational ties in this study.

The interactional lives of transnational families are also patterned by social class, limiting the class analysis to economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Migration flows from the global South to the North have solid economic underpinnings (Abrego, 2009; Elabor-Idemudia, 2015; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). However, the political economy of labour migration in an era of global capitalism introduces bifurcated social class in the lifeworld of the migrants. On the one hand, their migration positions them mostly in conditions and sectors of employment that diminishes the real value of their labour. On the other hand, given the relatively lower living standards in their originating regions, migrants can save and invest back home in socially lucrative ventures. Some of these ventures include housing (Diko & Tipple, 1992; Pellow, 2003), small-scale businesses, community-level social projects (Levitt, 2004), or support the chain migration of their other

relatives (Darkwah et al., 2019). Given these dynamics, the social status of migrants increases vis-à-vis that of other community members back home (Tiemoko, 2004). This high status of migrants, therefore, influences the flows and patterns of transnational social interactions. Migrants mainly send remittances back home; they also procure communication devices for their families and fund the cost of airtime (Horst, 2006; Mahler, 2001; Wong, 2006). The economic privilege of migrants in the homeland notwithstanding, their relations back home also offer services on their behalf, a phenomenon which Mazzucato (2009) refers to as ‘reverse remittances’. Reverse remittances, therefore, underlines the degree of reciprocity that sustains transactional families interactions and exchanges.

Additionally, there are differentiations in the economic opportunities of migrants based on their legal status in their destination countries. Regular migrants have more social and economic advancement options than their irregular counterparts (Castles et al., 2012; Tanle, 2012; United Nations, 2014). Irregular migrants are therefore exposed to higher levels of precariousness that shapes their transnational experience. Transnational networks situated in the migrants’ networks model have been highly utilised by migrants who encounter higher degrees of risk and vulnerability (Mazzucato, 2009b). At the same time, the usage of contemporary ICT technologies which connect migrants and their networks of relations brings about nostalgia and emotional arousal due to the intensity, frequency and multi-modality of interactions it engenders (Baldassar, 2008; Baldassar et al., 2007; Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Parreñas, 2005). Therefore, the heightened emotional intensity is minimised by the ability of families to visit each other to complete their interactional experiences. However, irregular migrants risk ending their migration project when they visit the homeland. This situation can entrench their precariousness and uneasiness as they engage in continued virtual contact with limited or no physical contact. Thus, in some contexts

such as the Philippines, irregular migrants ‘remit’ the physical touch sometimes desired among transnational relations by requesting friends who visit the homeland to meet and hug their relations (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). By including irregular migrants as a vital context variable, the study highlights the various ways in which they share their transnational lives with their families, given their unique vulnerabilities.

There is a consensus in the literature on the generational dimensions of transnational family interactions. The younger generation uses ICTs more intensely because they are born into the digital age. In comparison, the older generation migrates into the digital age and therefore demonstrates limited usage of ICTs (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Twenge, 2017). Other variables such as educational/literacy levels, spatial location, and income intersect with one’s generation to determine how ICTs are used (Castells et al., 2007). Moreover, the younger generation encounters social constraints in their ICT usage, for example, when parents do not buy a phone for their dependent children because they believe they are not old enough to own one. Parents can also shape the exposure of their children by setting limits and preferences for them online. The younger generation who find themselves in primary and secondary school environments also experience some restraints to using some forms of ICTs. All these social constraints temper the extent to which the younger generation appropriate and use ICTs.

The foregoing accounts demonstrate that ICT interacts with context-specific factors to shape the experiences of users. However, the focus of empirical studies on Ghanaian transnational families has largely ignored the central importance of ICT usage in shaping the outcomes of such relationships. Given this, transnational family studies in Ghana have mainly centred on tangible outcomes such as the care of children left behind (Cebotari et al., 2018; Dankyi, 2011), reconstitution and disruptions in particular kin relationships (Asima, 2018; Coe, 2011; Darkwah

et al., 2019), the patterns of provisioning of material forms of care such as remittances (Kabki et al., 2004; Wong, 2006), the transformations in care practices (Coe, 2017), gender relations (Manuh, 1999), class structure (Nieswand, 2014), customary practices such as funerals (Mazzucato et al., 2006) among others. Therefore, this study is an effort to incorporate a technology perspective into migrant family studies by paying attention to the technology-mediated interactional processes employed to produce various outcomes among transnational families.

The limited empirical research conducted in the Ghanaian setting on transnational couples by Adiku (2017) ignores other variables that need research emphasis. To this end, the study adds to the initial work of (Adiku, 2017) by extending the scope of kin relationships beyond couples to include children and extended families. This extended focus is vital given the salience of extended family relationships in Ghana (Nukunya, 2016). The modernisation of Ghanaian society has reconfigured some elements of traditional family life (Aboderin, 2004; Manful & Cudjoe, 2018; Nukunya, 2016). This notwithstanding the importance of extended kin relationships continue to be salient, evident in various kinds of mutual support (Mazzucato, 2009; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012).

Lastly, ICT is noted to be adapted by users into their social context in ways that transform their uses (Asante, 2014; Silverstone et al., 2005). This social shaping of technologies requires that studies on ICT usage are conducted in all the social settings in which they are deployed to map out the various ways in which their uses are instrumentalised and transformed. Moreover, ICTs as a material resource are situated in power and inequality patterns that shape their supply and demand (Benítez, 2012). The Ghanaian ICT landscape presents different insights to the literature on transnational interactions - a gap and a further justification for this study.

## **2.5 ICT and Society: Insights from Technological Determinism and Social Construction of Technology Perspectives**

Technological determinism represents a non-unified perspective to an understanding of the place of technology in society. The perspective is traced to the work of Karl Marx and his historical materialist analysis of the role of technology in the labour process – a perspective that reduces histories to the material conditions of life (Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018). Therefore, technology development occurs outside society without the influence of social, economic, and political forces. These developments, in turn, shape social change (Wyatt, 2008). Given the reductionism embedded in this perspective, Bimber (1994, p. 99) highlights that it takes “a view of history in which human will has no real value – in which culture, social organization and values derive from laws of nature that are manifest through technology”. Technology, therefore, stands akin to nature and thus provides the material constraints within which human agency and will are exercised (Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018).

The influence of the perspective is seen in history, where whole civilisations are reduced to a particular technology such as ‘the stone age’, ‘iron age’, or ‘computer age’. Mumford (1955) explains the technological reductionist account of history by highlighting that anthropologists and archaeologists were the first academics to consider technology seriously. As they studied pre-literate societies, whose major historical relics were material artefacts, those artefacts were used to categorise those civilizations. The influence of technological determinism is seen beyond the expedient categorisation of historians and archaeologists. In a recent publication, Twenge (2017) provides a telling account of the ‘iGen’, a generation of persons born from 1995 in American society, and how their smartphone usage has shaped their lives. According to her, the iGen have been rendered more individualistic, with more significant tendencies for anxiety, depression, and loneliness with limited social skills and entirely unprepared for the responsibilities of adulthood.

Further reactions to how technologies are shaping human lives and experiences can be seen in the works of sociologists of the ‘late modern’ era. They argue, for example, that advances in transportation and communication technologies have created “time-space distancing” (Giddens, 1990), defined as the removal of the constraints of space from time, which enables social encounters and interactions to be shared with people in different spatial locations and across different periods. Another conceptualisation in the modern era is that contemporary technologies have totalised surveillance. Therefore, the totalising effect of surveillance has removed it from the spatial boundedness of those controlling the surveillance system, leading to a post-panopticon society (Sacacas, 2020). In everyday common-sense knowledge, the language of technological determinism is expressed when there is a protest against automation because of job losses, income insecurities and its attendant effects on family life.

In spite of the popularism of technological determinism, the perspective has received many critiques in the discipline of Science, Technology and Society (STS). Key among these include the reduction of the agency of social actors; technologies are not only material artefacts but also ideas, innovations, and production systems situated in already existing systems of power, inequality, and control. It presents a reductionist account of the place of technology in society; and that technologies have no essence to ‘determine’ social actions (Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018; Sismondo, 2010; Wyatt, 2008). Given this, its influence has waned in favour of other theoretical perspectives. However, the appeal of the perspective to everyday users of technology begs academic sympathies (Wyatt, 2008). In this vein, I draw insights from the works of Herbert Marshall McLuhan to make sense of some of the interview data from participants of the study.

Herbert Marshall McLuhan (July 21, 1911 – December 31, 1980) was a Canadian communication theorist and professor of English. He spent much of his career at the University of Toronto, where

he headed the Centre for Culture and Technology (Carey, 1967; Rogers, 2000). McLuhan is linked to Harold Innis (1894 – 1952), a Canadian economic historian, arguing that the platforms on which words are recorded are more important than the words themselves.

However, both differ on the influence of the platform or media for transmitting words. Innis linked the influence to structures of society, while McLuhan linked it to the sensory perception and thoughts of individuals (Carey, 1967). Thus, McLuhan popularised, ‘the medium is the message’ (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1994/1964). Carey (1967) linked the phrase to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in the discipline of sociolinguistics. Whereas the hypothesis proposes that language shapes the structure of reality, McLuhan’s proposition that ‘the medium is the message’ suggests that the structure of our realities is shaped by the communication media with which we engage. McLuhan also proposed that mass communication media – the forms of technology that formed the basis of his analysis, is an extension of man (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1994/1964). He, therefore, argues that “all media, from the phonetic alphabet to the computer, are extensions of the individual that cause great and lasting changes in him and transform his environment” McLuhan (1962, p. 13). For example, print media extends the memory – a phenomenon McLuhan claims brought about the Renaissance of European civilization – while audio-based media extends the auditory senses and video-based media the gaze/sight. These sensory extensions enable the individual to be involved in events and experiences in far-off locations, which has consequences for social life. This study appreciates this perspective that the use of communication media extends the users and influences their perceptions.

McLuhan was considered controversial, and the basis for his model, which was the literary text, was downplayed by some communication scholars who preferred conventional methods such as surveys, experiments and content analysis (Rogers, 2000). Nevertheless, the influence of

technological determinism, in general, has not waned even though McLuhan's influence in the discipline of communication studies may have waned from his earlier academic celebrity status (Carey, 1967; Rogers, 2000). Recent studies also highlight how technology shapes the social world (Postman, 1992; Sacasas, 2020; Twenge, 2017).

Another theoretical perspective on the place of technology in society that the study draws on is social constructivism approaches. Berger and Luckmann (1966) were the first to use the phrase "social construction", and they built on the phenomenological tradition of Alfred Schutz by proposing that reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge should be concerned with the processes of construction. However, unlike Berger and Luckmann (1966), who were concerned with society at large, the social construction of technology focuses on sub-cultures such as science and technology. The proponents of this approach reacted to some of the fundamental critiques of the technological determinism perspective (Bijker & Pinch, 1987; Mauthner & Kazimierczak, 2018). They contested the notion that technology is an autonomous, independent and external force that drives social change as they believe the operation and influence of technologies are linked to the socio-political context of their design, development and adaptation (Bijker & Pinch, 1987; Rogers, 1986; Silverstone et al., 2005). The social construction of technology movement is not monolithic, and Sismondo (1993, p. 516) classifies four main approaches within the movement as follows:

- (a) the construction, through the interplay of actors, of institutions, including knowledge, methodologies, fields, habits, and regulative ideals;
- (b) the construction by scientists of theories and accounts, in the sense that these are structures that rest upon bases of data and observations;
- (c) the construction, through material intervention, of artefacts in the laboratory; and
- (d) the construction, in the neo-Kantian sense, of the objects of thought and representation.

I draw mainly from Wiebe E. Bijker (born: 19<sup>th</sup> March 1951), a Dutch professor of Philosophy and Science and Technology Studies and his joint studies with Trevor J. Pinch (born: 1<sup>st</sup> January 1952), a British Sociologist. Although the earlier works of Bijker are related to epistemologies of social constructions, which fall within the second category of Sismondo (1993) distinctions among the social constructionist movement, his work that forms the reference for this study falls within the first category. In that study of the high-wheeled ordinary bicycle developed in the 1870s, Bijker and Pinch (1987) and later Bijker (1995) elaborated a three-step process through which technologies are constructed among producers and end-users.

The first step uses the concepts ‘relevant social group’ and ‘interpretive flexibility’ to describe how relevant social groups distinctively describe a technological artefact. For example, the mobile phone to a group of traders may be described as a technology that facilitates business transactions such as linkages to clients and business partners and financial transactions through mobile money. The same technology may be described as a tool for chatting and networking on social media to a group of undergraduate students. Therefore, these various descriptions by the relevant social groups cast the artefact differently and thus ‘interpretive flexibility’. Therefore, the different interpretations bring about different artefacts – a social chat & networking device for the students; and a mobile market device for the traders, following the previous example.

In the second step, the concept of ‘stabilization’ is employed to describe how ‘interpretive flexibility’ converges as the differences in attributions diminish given the dominance of some interpretive frameworks over others. Therefore, the ‘stabilization’ is a multigraph design process where conflicts over interpretations of the artefact are ironed out until closure. No further modification occurs as the artefact achieves a final form. Thus, both traders and students use

mobile phones to make calls and interact with other persons. This common usage may cause developers to pay attention to the call and interactional functionality of the mobile phone.

In the last step, the concept “technological frame” is used to describe the process of stabilization in the second step. The technological frame is defined as the structure that shapes the action and thought of a ‘relevant social group’, akin to the concept of ‘paradigm’ by Kuhn (1962). However, whereas Kuhn (ibid) usage of paradigm is limited to the academic community, the technological frame is applied to all kinds of important social groups. The technological frame is generated when social interactions concerning an artefact commence.

The social construction of technology (SCOT) approach presented by Bijker (1995) and Bijker and Pinch (1987) portrays iterative ways in which producers and users of a technological artefact co-construct the product and its uses. Despite its appeal, particularly over the technological determinism approach, it has been criticised for relying too much on actors' agency and muting power's influence in disrupting the so-called ‘relevant social groups’ (Klein & Kleinman, 2002).

In synthesising the salient insights from the technological determinism and the SCOT perspectives, I emphasise that the usage of contemporary technologies by transnational families extends the self to multiple locations that enable users to participate in the ongoing interactions and events taking place in all the multiple locations. However, in spite of the extensions created by contemporary technologies, the different user groups – wives left behind, parents in the homeland, children in the homeland, migrant relations, and other extended relations – all construct their usage of the technology as they relate with each other. This thesis, therefore, attends to the myriad ways in which different user groups construct their usage of the technology even as they relate with each other. As the study focuses only on end-users of the technological artefacts, I ignore the various

ways the SCOT perspective accounts for how producers also shape the usability of the communication technologies. However, the perspective provides an understanding of the processes through which the mobile phone has become more user-friendly and thereby sheds light on the variations in user experiences in the different technological epochs the study considers.

## **2.6 Conclusions**

The review has thus far situated the major thematic areas of the study – families, transnationalism and communication technologies – within ongoing discourses in the respective disciplines given the multi-disciplinary focus of the study. In the field of family studies, I have demonstrated, beginning from a review of pertinent sociological literature that touches on the structural changes of post-industrial societies, the far-reaching changes that have influenced the shapes and patterns of contemporary families. Given the changes, I highlight the difficulties in adopting a structural perspective to the study of contemporary families as family forms have become more complex with salient continuities amidst salient changes. I, therefore, situate this current study in the micro-level agentic analysis of experiences, a perspective emphasised by Morgan (1996) with the concept “families of practice” and “doing families”. Further, I highlight the theoretical trajectories that led to the transnational turn in migration studies by elaborating some of the key explanatory models of migration and framing the discussions with empirical studies that show how ICT facilitates or constrains transnational interactions. The empirical studies also emphasise the importance of contextual factors such as gender and power relations, geopolitics and other broad-based social-cultural influences that shape the experiences of transnational families.

In spite of this recognition, the literature survey further indicated that Ghanaian-specific elaborations are very limited. However, there are voluminous studies on Ghanaian transnational families that focus on the outcomes and not the processes of their interactions. Therefore, the niche

for the current study is carved from Adiku (2017), by extending her focus from only couples in her case, to children, parents, siblings, and other members of the extended family given their salience in the Ghanaian context. Further, the growing influence of irregular migrants makes them an added focus of the study. The heightened vulnerability of irregular migrants leads to a qualitatively different transnational experience from regular migrants. The ways in which technologies for linking migrants and their non-migrant relations in Ghana are adapted in the Ghanaian transnational family settings also become a final justification for the study, given the sparse empirical literature on Ghana.

Finally, the study draws theoretical insights from two contrasting perspectives in science and technology to account for how communication technologies are positioned in the interactions of transnational families. First, the technological determinism of Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1994/1964) and second, the SCOT approach of Wiebe E. Bijker and Trevor J. Pinch (Bijker, 1995; Bijker & Pinch, 1987). A synthesis of these two perspectives highlights how contemporary technologies extend the self to multiple other locations through the multi-modal means of interactions. At the same time, different user groups of the technologies define and adapt their uses to promote their interests. The SCOT approach further throws light on how communication technologies have over the years been made user-friendly, especially when compared to those of the past.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH APPROACH**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The research approach for this study is premised on some fundamental philosophical assumptions related to the concepts of ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). These assumptions influence how I view social reality, the relationship between me and the research subjects, my values in shaping that reality, and how knowledge about that reality can be gained.

In spite of the distinctive delineation of the philosophical concepts, when one of them is assumed, the boundaries for the definition of the others are constrained. Further, in terms of the primacy of the assumptions, propositions about ontology are central as they shape how one makes epistemological and consequently methodological and axiological questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As these assumptions are essential, I begin this chapter by setting them out and highlighting how they shaped the general approach to the study.

#### **3.2 Philosophical Assumptions – Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, Methodology**

Ontology relates to the nature of reality. Broadly, two main stances underpin social researchers' perception of reality – the realist and the relativist (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Noonan, 2012; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). The realist stance assumes that there is a reality that exists independently of human interpretations and conceptions. The relativist position, in contrast, assumes that reality is dependent on human conceptions and thus is constructed rather than fixed.

In this study, I assume the ontological position of a relativist. However, I emphasise that the constructions occur at an intersubjective level and not at the individual level. These intersubjectivities are further constrained by the interactional space of any given social actors (Baber, 1991). Epistemology deals with the relationship between the researcher and the researched and the theories of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Stone, 2012). Given the ontological relativist assumption, I proceed that knowledge is co-created by both the researched and the researcher in an immersive subjective process where the personal values and moral judgements of the parties involved shape the processes of knowledge generation.

In view of the researcher's immersion in the processes of knowledge production, axiological considerations become essential in the research process. Axiology is the metaphysical study of values and is concerned with ethics and aesthetics (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). Values influence the research processes in several ways – one's metaphysical assumptions, the kinds of research interests that are nurtured, and how one goes about 'constructing' the research findings. Knowledge production then becomes a value-laden process. It is, therefore, necessary to make visible the myriad ways personal values enter the research process in a reflexive space.

The qualitative methodology then becomes the desirable methodology following the aforementioned philosophical assumptions. A qualitative approach is particularly relevant to this study as it offers the tools for an in-depth analysis, exploration, and the construction of meanings (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). The social sciences developed by anchoring its methodological principles on the natural sciences leading to an earlier interest in the positivist and quantitative approaches. However, there has been a growing and heightened interest in interpretive qualitative approaches, given the critiques of the traditional

positivistic approaches (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005). Guba and Lincoln (1994) have summed up these critiques as intra and inter paradigm. The intra paradigm critiques highlight the exclusion of purpose and meaning as possible areas for inquiry. Also, point out the difficulty to relate grand theories to particular local contexts. Finally, the emphasis on control and randomisation, resulting in the reduced relevance of theories as their generalizability becomes problematic. The inter paradigm critiques also challenge the so-called utility of independent a-prior theories and hypotheses as they are dependent on each other.

Further, the critiques have brought to the fore that theories do not necessarily account for all the reality purported to be described. Thus, science pursued in a singular positivistic/quantitative manner cannot be relied upon as the source of all 'real' truth. Again, scientific facts are not value-free as values shape the scientific processes in profound ways. Lastly, the model of the objectively detached enquirer is questioned as problematic (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 106-107).

Therefore, the invitation to qualitative interpretive methodology represents an attempt to centre meanings, diversity, and creativity of both the researched and the researcher while paying more attention to localised rather than meta-narratives. To this end, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) conceptualise the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur or quilt maker who weaves the intricate complexities of life into colourful patterns of meanings and differences.

It is relevant to highlight that methodological differences do not necessarily imply superiority or relevance over the other. Guba and Lincoln (1994) draw attention to the fact that all research paradigms – the metaphysical assumptions that feed into a particular approach to research, are based on first principles rooted in faith rather than on any hard proofs.

As qualitative methodologies are varied, it is essential to emphasise the particular methodology I adopted for this study – the constructivist grounded theory method of Kathy Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006). In the following section, I pay brief attention to the historical developments in grounded theory and its basic presuppositions and how I used the method in this study.

### **3.3 From Grounded to the Constructivist Grounded Theory Method**

Grounded theory was developed by Barney Glaser (1930 -) and Anselm Strauss (1916 – 1996) in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory, Strategies for Qualitative Research* in the late 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The book emerged in a period that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as the golden age of qualitative research, which saw a more significant concern among social scientists of the weaknesses of the positivistic quantitative approaches to research. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that the practice of social researchers of using a-prior theories in making sense of their empirical findings makes the research processes tied to theories of the past. Also, they noted that a-prior theories bring about class-based divisions among social scientists. Thus, the few who generate the theories and the masses who have to ensure that their research conformed to those theories. Given this, they laid out in their book an inductive approach to generating theories that are ‘grounded in data’.

Glaser and Strauss had different backgrounds in quantitative and qualitative approaches, respectively, that influenced the development of the theory. Therefore, their mixed backgrounds provided the unique blend that made their attempt to centre the systematic practice of qualitative research ground-breaking.

At the same time, their background, particularly Strauss', brought some weaknesses in the theory that led to various reconstructions of the classical grounded theory approach (Rupšienė & Pranskuniene, 2010). In particular, the weaknesses centred on their failure to problematise data, thereby rebounding to the positivist stance they sought to challenge (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011). Thus, data is not an objective reality confronting the researcher but is produced as much from the researcher's positionality as from the researched (Bryant & Charmaz, 2011).

Following the critiques of the classical grounded theory method, a number of the former students of the proponents began to revise the classical prescriptions. One of such revisions, the constructivist grounded theory of Kathy Charmaz, is the framework that influenced the data gathering processes of this study. The constructivist grounded theory of Charmaz emphasises that first, there is more than one account of reality. Thus, reality is processual and created – but created under particular conditions. Second, the research process emerges from interactions. Third, the process should take into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants. The researcher and researched co-construct the data. Therefore data is a product of the research processes, not simply observed objects of it. Researchers are part of the research situation, and their positions, privileges, perspectives, and interactions affect it (Charmaz, 2005, 2008, 2014). Charmaz (2008) revises her constructivist position to that of a constructionist while recognising that the difference between the two perspectives is blurred and perhaps may have eluded her in her initial conception of the grounded theory (Keller & Charmaz, 2016). Charmaz (2008, p. 402) therefore clarifies how the social constructionist perspective influences her grounded theory perspective:

social constructionists disavow the idea that researchers can or will begin their studies without prior knowledge and theories about their topics. Rather than being a tabula rasa, constructionists advocate recognizing prior knowledge and theoretical preconceptions and subjecting them to rigorous scrutiny. Rather than assuming that theory emerges from data,

constructionists assume that researchers construct categories of the data. Instead of aiming to achieve parsimonious explanations and generalizations devoid of context, constructionists aim for an interpretive understanding of the studied phenomenon that accounts for context. As opposed to giving priority to the researcher's views, constructionists see participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis and its presentation'.

Overall, Charmaz's work focuses on the researcher's place in the text, their relationship with the research participants, and the central place of writing in constructing a final text that remains grounded in the data (Birks & Mills, 2015). She, therefore, highlights three essential procedures of her grounded theory method – coding, memo writing, and theoretical sampling - that inform the methods of this study (Charmaz, 2014; Keller & Charmaz, 2016).

### **3.4 Sampling Approach**

The sampling approach of the study took into consideration the following: the appropriate setting for the study, given the research questions; the participants to be involved; and the events or actors to be interviewed or observed (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014). The appropriate setting for the study was chosen without recourse to systematic data on international migration, as such data in Ghana is hard to find. This notwithstanding, efforts were made to achieve some degree of variation in the sample that reflects the two broad patterns of international migration in Ghana – regular and irregular migrants. The variation is based on the assumption that the experiences of transnational families may vary depending on the legal status of the migrant family member.

In particular, the study areas were selected based on a national analysis on the flow of internal migration by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2014) from the 2010 Population and Housing Census in Ghana (Table 3.1). The limitation of the data in Table 3.1 is that it is difficult to determine the incidence of international migration (the focus of this research) based on reports on

internal migration. However, scholarly literature on migration and spatial development shed extra light on the phenomenon to enable one to make an informed choice on particular zones to centre the research.

Table 3.1 indicates that the Greater Accra Region has the highest positive migration effectiveness ratio of 66.4, which implies that migration to the region exceeds emigration from same. Additionally, based on the sheer numbers of persons moving to Accra, it becomes the most cosmopolitan region in the country. These dynamics have two profound influences on the probable density of transnational families. First, some studies on migration, highlighting the role of social networks, have demonstrated that emigrants sometimes move to transitory zones to take advantage of opportunity structures such as information, transportation, public amenities and social ties to move to a final destination (Liu, 2013; Press, 2017). Further, the literature on urbanisation and peri-urban development in Ghana suggests that access to land is increasingly being privatised and individualised in contrast to communal ownership (Aryeetey et al., 2007; Owusu, 2008). This implies that emigrants interested in expanding their landed property holdings back home are more likely to consider Accra as their preferred zone and consequently re-locate their families to Accra. The added advantage of access to foreign currencies also gives the emigrants a competitive edge over the land compared to the average non-migrant Ghanaian.<sup>3</sup> Thus, different persons are located in Accra, including transnational families, and therefore the choice.

Additionally, one cannot wholly undertake holistic research on transnational families or migration in Ghana without giving cognizance to the influence of irregular migrants in the migration discourse, thus the preference for Nkoranza in the Bono East Region. Nkoranza is selected due to

---

<sup>3</sup> This argument is primarily underlined by the New Economies of Migration Literature which suggests that migration is one of the livelihood enhancement strategies of families.

the community's increased scholarly attention, highlighting the high incidence of irregular migration (Darkwah et al., 2019; Kleist, 2017; Tanle, 2012). Media reports further corroborate the density of irregular migrants during the latest wave of deportation from Libya. The reports indicated that most of the deportees returned to the Nkoranza District, where Nkoranza is located.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 3.1: Migration Effectiveness Ratio for Each Region**

Region	Out Migrants	In Migrants	Net Migrants	Gross Migrants	Migration Effectiveness Ratio
Western	279,394.00	561,513.00	282,119.00	840,907.00	33.5
Central	612,458.00	374,443.00	-238,015.00	986,901.00	-24.1
Greater Accra	322,874.00	1,598,326.00	1,275,452.00	1,921,200.00	66.4
Volta	681,833.00	146,162.00	-535,671.00	827,995.00	-64.7
Eastern	750,400.00	418,314.00	-332,086.00	1,168,714.00	-28.4
Ashanti	613,731.00	853,751.00	240,020.00	1,467,482.00	16.4
Brong Ahafo	339,687.00	457,571.00	117,884.00	797,258.00	14.8
Northern	433,121.00	100,524.00	-332,597.00	533,645.00	-62.3
Upper East	328,990.00	61,298.00	-267,692.00	390,288.00	-68.6
Upper West	252,841.00	43,427.00	-209,414.00	296,268.00	-70.7

Source: Ghana Statistical Services, 2014a: page 32

In addition to the primary locations selected for the study, I drew insights from my interactions and observation of some Ghanaians in Vienna, Austria and Düsseldorf, Germany. The interactions and observations in the two locations abroad were occasioned by a students' exchange programme I participated in at the inception of the fieldwork period. These multiple locations in Ghana and abroad provided avenues for a nuanced transnational perspective. Overall, I engaged Ghanaians abroad, their relations back home (to a limited degree), and other localised Ghanaians in transnational family relationships.

<sup>4</sup> <http://ghananewsagency.org/politics/nkoranza-returnees-association-launched-34245> accessed on 30th October, 2018

Additionally, I incorporated nuclear and extended families into the sample, given their importance in the Ghanaian setting. Thus, the study participants were composed of spouses, adult children between the ages of 18-25 years who were unmarried and dependent, parents, siblings and other extended relations (see table 3.2).

Even though the experiences of younger children in transnational families would have been salient for a study such as this, children included in the sample are much older, and in legal terms, are classified as adults. However, the inclusion criteria of the children is relevant as older children responding to some of the crisis of development evident in state failure, and the excesses of neoliberal capitalism are as equally dependent as younger ones (Haynes et al., 2002). Honwana (2012) categorised such youth to be in a period of 'waithood' where they are socially not considered children but are generally unable to transition to the phase of adulthood due to the lack of opportunities and their considerable level of dependence on others.

Further, during the fieldwork, I discovered that the usage of communication technologies for children below the age of 18 years was dependent on and residual to that of their parents or caregivers. A few such children interviewed initially emphasised that they did not own mobile phones and thus only interact with their relations abroad through an adult. I, therefore, considered that paying attention to such children, given their limited usage of communication technologies, would be of little value to the interest of the study.

**Table 3.2: Gender and kinship disaggregation of in-depth interview participants**

	<i>Spouses</i>		<i>Adult Children (18 years and above)</i>		<i>Parents</i>		<i>Siblings &amp; Other Extended Relations</i>		<i>Total In- depth Interviews</i>
	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	
	14	6	11	9	2	9	6	4	
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>		<b>20</b>		<b>11</b>		<b>10</b>		<b>61</b>

**Source: Field Work, December 2018- July 2020**

Three main sampling methods were used to identify the study participants – snowballing, purposive sampling and theoretical sampling.

Snowballing was used given the networks existing among the participants (Creswell, 2007; Neuman, 2014). In Nkoranza, for example, which is more closely knitted, community members could quickly identify members of transnational families. Thus, after interviewing any particular participant, they would usually introduce me to the next person for another interview.

Purposive sampling was also used, given the diversity of participants required for the study (Creswell, 2007). There were instances where I had to rely on a community liaison person to identify male spouses, as they were hard to find within the population given the gendered nature of migration, particularly among the married (Darkwah et al., 2019). I also relied on key informants to gain more insights into any particular phenomenon of interest.

Lastly, theoretical sampling was used to gain in-depth insights and clarity on emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006). Because of this, the data gathering took place in three different phases. Phase one took place from December 2018 to March 2019 in Vienna, Düsseldorf and Accra. The second

phase also took place in May 2019 at Nkoranza. The final phase at Nkoranza took place in August 2019 and Accra from September 2019 to July 2020. During the initial data gathering and concurrent analysis, themes such as ‘freeloading’, ‘surveillance’, ‘selective contact leading to an always-on but off contact relationships’ were identified. Thus, the second phase of the fieldwork focused on building a more nuanced understanding of these themes with theoretical sampling. The third phase was a mop-up exercise. It provided the opportunity to contact persons who had been recommended for the interview but whose schedules were inflexible until a later period. Additionally, I searched for more secondary data to make meaning out of the themes generated in the last phase.

### **3.5 Study Areas**

According to Hess (2000), Accra emerged as a central trade administration centre for the Ga-Dangme ethnic group towards the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The current status of Accra as the cosmopolitan hub of Ghana is attributed to its designation as the national capital of Ghana by the British administration in 1877. This status of Accra, coupled with the deliberate metropolitan-satellite growth agenda of the colonial administration and post-independence governments, made Accra a pull centre for some migrants from other parts of the country and beyond (Konadu-Agyemang, 2001). Formal sector employment avenues are greatest in Accra in comparison to all the other regions in the country.

Also, given the migration induced population growth, Accra enjoys a considerable market size that makes it a thriving place for all kinds of goods and services offered by the informal sector (GSS, 2019). When one moves beyond the precincts of Accra, the stark differences between the region

and other parts of the country in terms of socio-economic development become glaring. However, within the region itself, there are pockets of spatial underdevelopment, burgeoning slums (Grant, 2009) and an increasing number of persons classified as the urban poor, with an aggravated poverty and vulnerability index (Essamuah & Tonah, 2004; Yeboah, 2010).

The Gas, a patrilineal ethnic group, are autochthonous to Accra. However, given the negative net migration ratio in Accra, the autochthonous Gas are an ethnic minority. According to GSS (2019), forty-six per cent (46%) of household heads in Accra are Akans, while the indigenous Gas are approximately twenty-eight per cent (28.2%) of the same category. Further, eighty-five per cent (85%) of household heads in Accra are Christians, while Muslims make up approximately ten per cent (9.7%) of the same category. In terms of education, approximately twelve per cent (12.4%) of residents in Accra have never been to school. The language composition of residents of Accra is diverse. However, the average resident is fluent in at least English or Twi (GSS, 2019).

The fieldwork experience in Accra was quite different from that of Nkoranza, as I am resident in Accra. Also, the city is so large that no community entry was done. I only had to negotiate an interview period and access to the participants at the micro-level, as a number of them were persons in my social network. Despite the use of the spatial label Accra as one of the study areas, it is essential to highlight that participants from Accra were specifically from the following suburbs – Achimota, Tema, East Legon Hills, Kwabenya, Ashaley Botwe, Old Dansoman, Haatso, Pokuase and Ayikai Doblo near Amasaman. Some of the suburbs point to the increasing spatial expansion of Accra beyond its traditional boundaries (Owusu, 2008; Owusu & Agyei-Mensah, 2011). The study had no particular plan on which of the suburbs in Accra to recruit participants. There is currently no spatial zoning of the city/region called Accra that highlights densities of transnational families and thus the justification for the particular suburbs.

According to oral tradition, Nkoranza as a state was established by ‘three old men’ literally translated in Akan as ‘Nkokoramiensa’ in 1720 (Anane-Agyei, 2012). In terms of contemporary political organisation, Nkoranza is part of the Bono East Region and the Nkoranza South municipality, with Nkoranza as the municipal capital. In an interview with the Municipal Planning Officer, she indicated that residents of Nkoranza make up one-third of all the people in the municipality. She also highlighted that the community members are predominantly Akans, who speak Bono, one of the Twi dialects of the Akans and are mainly Christians even though the Muslim community has a visible presence. The economic life of members of the community is organised mainly by farming crops such as yams, maize, cashew and watermelon, as well as informal sector trade and provision of services. Nkoranza was part of the erstwhile Brong Ahafo Region. Compared to Accra, the region has a relatively higher rate of persons who have never been to school – 31.5% vis-à-vis 12.4% of Accra. There remains a considerable urban bias in education attainment in Ghana (GSS, 2019), and this partly accounts for the specific livelihood choices of the people in Nkoranza – farming and informal sector trading.

Field entry in Nkoranza was necessary because, as a new person in the community, I needed to seek legitimacy for my activities in the community from the gatekeepers. Thus, I visited the Municipal Assembly and the Registry of the Traditional Council, taking cognizance of the dual nature of the political organisation in the country – traditional leaders and modern political leaders. At the Municipal Assembly Office, I met the Chief Executive, who welcomed me and provided all the support I needed for the fieldwork. Particularly, he assigned the Human Relations Officer of the Assembly, an indigene, to help me recruit the required persons for the study. The officer’s assistance to me was very great and consequently led to the success of the fieldwork in the community. The registrar of the Traditional Council also briefed me about the state of affairs of

the community about chieftaincy and other pertinent issues. He provided me with valuable history of the community - both oral and written accounts, some of which informed the accounts I have narrated about the community and further linked me to some community members in transnational family relationships.

In Vienna and Düsseldorf, my community experience was limited mainly to the church and the homes of a few Ghanaian/African community members. In Vienna, I fellowshiped with the English-speaking United Methodist Church, a multi-racial church with a millennial male pastor from the United States. In spite of the multi-racial composition of the church, about half of the congregation were Africans. My interactions with church members mainly were on Sundays, and I spent eight (8) of the twelve (12) Sundays with church members. Sunday worship service mostly lasted for an hour and a half. After the service, the tea/coffee fellowship was an excellent environment to interact with church members, especially the Ghanaian community. Some members of the Ghanaian community I met were with their families – mother, father, and children and in some cases, there were grandparents and other extended relations. They were employed mainly in the service sectors – in hotels, the United Nations Vienna office, transport, or teachers. Another spot for observation was my hostel, where I shared a room with my mobility partner. Two of her siblings live in the USA and another brother and sister-in-law in Italy. She would very often rope me into the issues that bring about virtual interactions with these relations.

Additionally, I was in Düsseldorf for one week. I lived with a German-Irish female who has been my friend since 2009 during our one-year Master of Arts programme in Development Studies at the University of Ghana. She shared with me her experiences with Ghanaian immigrants in Düsseldorf, which she had garnered through friendship and associations with some of the members of the Ghanaian community. One Sunday, I also visited the International Baptist Church,

Düsseldorf, and I was introduced to a Ghanaian family (couple, with two toddlers and a younger brother of the husband), who were friends to my host. The couple were students at the time of our meeting – the husband pursuing a PhD degree and the wife a Master’s degree. I had the opportunity to interact with them after church service during our tea/coffee fellowship and on a train ride back home. I also had virtual interviews and interactions with study participants in China, the USA, and Canada. Their families in Accra provided me with their contact numbers to match their responses.

In Vienna and Düsseldorf, I exchanged contact numbers with some of the critical persons I had engaged in the study. Thus, our interactions stretched beyond the period of mobility. For example, the wife I met in Düsseldorf visited Ghana for data collection for her thesis in May 2019, and we got in touch with each other. I am also still part of the WhatsApp group platform of an African based singing group in Vienna. Through my participation in such virtual platforms, I get a secondary awareness of how they organise as a community.

**Table 3.3: Educational Level of In-depth Interview Participants**

	<i>Basic</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Tertiary</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Accra</i>	2	0	22	<b>24</b>
<i>Nkoranza</i>	7	15	9	<b>31</b>
<i>Migrants (various overseas locations)</i>	0	1	5	<b>6</b>

**Source: Field Work, December 2018- July 2020**

The educational levels of the participants for the study from the various study areas are presented in table 3.3 above. From the table, participants in Accra and the migrants are more educated than those in Nkoranza. These differentials in educational attainment influence their ability to use text-based communication mediums and their preferences and appreciation of some of the

contemporary usages of the mobile phone. In addition to the differences in education, fifty-nine (59) of the participants indicated they are Christians while two (2) are Muslims. The high proportion of Christians in the sample perhaps influenced some of the anxiety of couples and children in transnational unions as contemporary charismatic Christianity in Ghana paints an image of the nuclear family as a spatially bounded unit (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Further, out of the sixty-one participants interviewed, only ten are from patrilineal kinship groups. The remaining fifty-one of the participants are from matrilineal groups. The ages of participants ranged between 18years and 78years, with an average age of 42 years.

### **3.6 Methods of Data Gathering and Analysis**

The data for the study was gathered primarily through in-depth interviews involving sixty-one participants. The interviews took place at a convenient place selected by the participants – their homes and workplaces. The migrants in Canada, China and the USA were interviewed on the phone. The interviews lasted an average of forty-five (45) minutes, and they were recorded with a digital recorder. The interview questions were semi-structured, and the questions asked bordered mainly on the different ways each of the participants experienced and practised their transnational family lives in different technological epochs (see appendices III-V). The interviews began with an icebreaker to get participants active and involved. The icebreaker centred on a personal introduction I presented to each participant, after which I provided transitioning questions explaining what the research is about, secured informed consent and elicited the consent of participants to use the recorder (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Informed consent was given orally due to the peculiarities of the Ghanaian informal context. Appending a signature to a consent form stood the possibility of being misinterpreted detrimentally. In the early part of the study, one of

the participants suggested that I was soliciting their personal information for the government to increase their tax burdens. After that encounter, I resorted to oral forms of informed consent. The interviews proceeded in a conversational turn-taking style (Collins, 2004), and participants asked questions when they felt the need to do so.

Out of the 61 participants, six pairs were matched, and the composition of the matched sample is presented below in table 3.4.

**Table 3.4: Kinship and Country of migration Composition of Matched Sample**

<i>Primary Respondent in Ghana</i>	<i>Kinship Category of Migrant Relative</i>	<i>Country of Migrant Relative</i>
<i>Father</i>	Daughter	Canada
<i>Son</i>	Mother	United States of America
<i>Nephew</i>	Uncle	Austria
<i>Wife</i>	Husband	China
<i>Sister-in-law</i>	Brother-in-Law	Germany
<i>Aunt</i>	Niece	China

**Source: Field Work, December 2018- July 2020**

The variety in the country of the migrant relatives is because the primary respondents were persons in transnational family relationships in Ghana. These persons had their relatives in different overseas locations. I was not interested in limiting the transnational experience to relations in any particular location abroad, as that would have prolonged my fieldwork in Ghana.

A number of the older participants, particularly those more than forty years old, have had varied transnational family experiences. Some were children of migrant parents and later became wives of migrant husbands; some had been migrants themselves and had to end their migration projects

along the line while they continued to be in transnational relationships with their siblings. Others also had a primary relative abroad who returned and resettled in Ghana and still have more distant relations abroad. Also, others had a spouse abroad who died while still outside and later, their matured children also migrated. Given the multifaceted experiences of the participants, they shared rich accounts that highlighted all the various phases of their transnational experiences.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, seven (7) key informants who had a deeper understanding of the transnational lives of migrants and their non-migrant relations were also interviewed (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). These key informants comprised: the manager of an erstwhile communication centre at Nkoranza; four members of church councils (two from Vienna and one each from Accra and Nkoranza), the registrar of the traditional council, Nkoranza and finally, the host of a television programme that has aired for about twenty years, which broadcasts informal good wishes from migrants abroad to their relations in Ghana. The insights garnered from these interviews, which followed the same protocols as the in-depth interviews, triangulated the responses from the in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007).

Secondary data were also used for the study. These data were all video files, two of which were trending on WhatsApp during the 2018 Christmas season. These trending videos I received when I was still outside the country were shared under the pretext of 'funny videos' but ca Additional video files consulted for the study were from various social media platforms – YouTube and Facebook of the TV programme. The use of social media data is contested as concerns have been raised that the actual participants in those sources may not be aware of the uses to which their accounts would be put. However, these sources are in the public domain, implying that their usages could be subject to the end user's purposes and intents (Marvasti, 2004; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). This notwithstanding, where the content owners could be traced, the owners' consent was

sought before using the YouTube and Facebook content. As the videos' content was not subject to the research processes, their information and insights helped triangulate further those derived from the in-depth and key informants' interviews.

Lastly, another method of data gathering was a non-participant observation, where I had the opportunity to see first-hand some of the experiences of Ghanaians both home and abroad in transnational relationships (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). The observation spots varied depending on the space I was engaged in – in Vienna, it was mainly the church, and secondarily, the home environment of those who invited me to their homes. In Düsseldorf, it was the composition of the family I met. In Nkoranza, where I had more expansive access to the community, the observation spot was the entire community – the market, the churches I visited, the homes of persons I interviewed, among others. In Accra, it was quite challenging to make any attribution from observed community activities to specifically micro-level family-based transnational activities, given the multi-faceted sources of influence driven by its cosmopolitan nature. However, when I visited the study participants' homes, they sometimes showed me visible activities and outcomes, such as residential properties derived from their transnational family networks. Data gathered through the observational method were recorded in a field diary, and the insights from the data were also triangulated and extended the interviews and secondary sources.

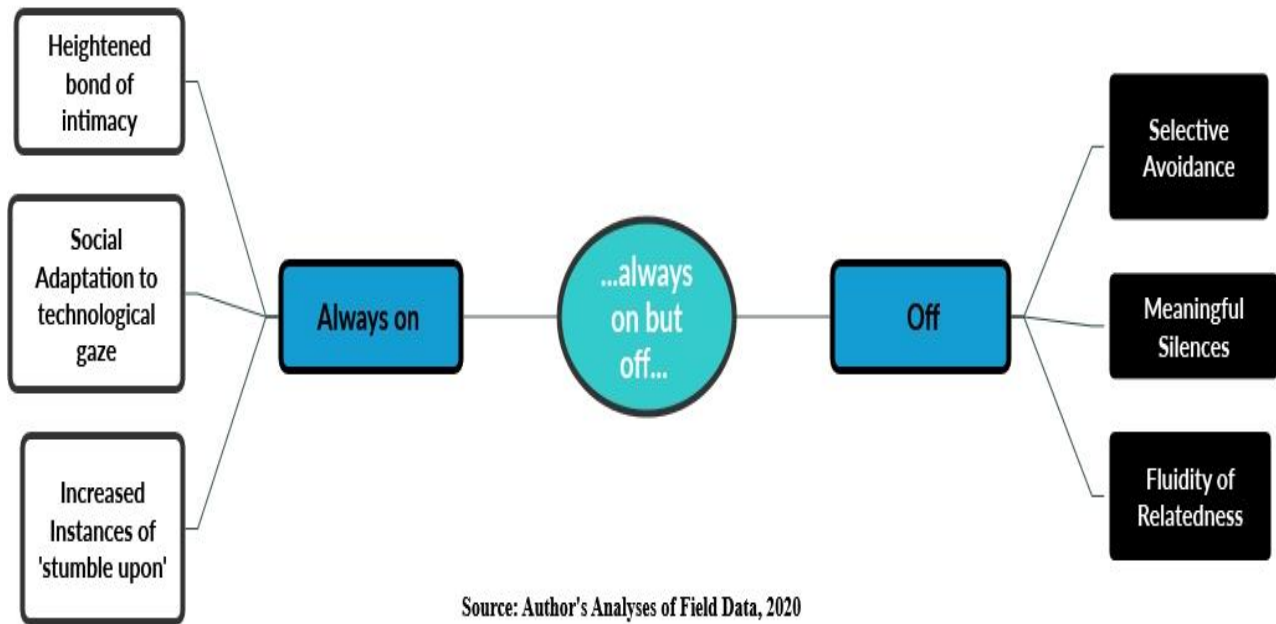
Various validation processes ensured that the generated data presented meaningful expressions and interpretations from the study participants. These included the already mentioned sources consulted – non-participant observations, in-depth and key informants' interviews, and secondary data. Additionally, specific themes were taken back to study participants to determine whether they accurately presented their responses – member checking (Creswell, 2007). At the end of each

interview session, a debriefing took place where among others, I provided a summary of the participant's responses based on how I understood them.

The data gathering and analyses took place concurrently. The analysis process entailed transcribing the interviews, coding both open and axial, and generating categories and themes from the codes. The coding was done in-vivo and in-vitro. In the in-vivo coding, participants' own words were used as labels for the codes, whereas the in-vitro entailed my concepts used to capture insights from the words of the participants (in vitro).

Various networks were generated from the themes as proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001) in her thematic network analysis. The analysis draws a broader theme and builds various sub-themes out of this broader theme (see Figure 3.0 for the thematic network analyses of patterns of interactions of transnational families from the field data). From Figure 3.0, an in-vivo code labelled 'always on but off' is used to capture the broader thematic focus of the nature of interactions among transnational families. This broader theme is further divided into two sub-themes – 'always on' and 'off' to emphasise the polarised nature of the interactions. These two sub-themes are further populated with related codes generated in-vitro. The discussions of chapter six, the final chapter on the findings, thus focus on the exemplified thematic network analyses provided in Figure 3.0. The two other chapters on the discussion of findings – four and three – elaborate the network analyses generated to answer the first two research questions.

FIGURE 3.0: Thematic Network Analyses of Patterns of Interactions



### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The proposal and protocols for the study were subject to the review of the ethical board of the College of Humanities of the University of Ghana, and their approval was given, with protocol number ECH 194/17-18 before the commencement of the main phase of the data gathering (see appendix I). The review aimed to ensure that the human subjects involved in the study are not in any way predisposed to harm from a direct or indirect process of the study. Particularly, the review sought to ensure that participants of the study would consent willingly to participate and withdraw their participation once any adverse effect is anticipated despite their consent.

Also, the review ensured that the participants' identities were protected, their privacy ensured, and the consent of legal guardians sought in instances where minors were involved. These ethical ideals

of the review board were followed during the fieldwork. Consent was given orally, as has already been highlighted, and the privacy concerns were context-specific and were also followed. Pseudonyms are used in the findings chapters where there is a need to quote from a participant. However, the communities in which the study took place have been disclosed, even though some qualitative method textbooks emphasise the need sometimes to use pseudonyms to promote the privacy of the participants and their communities (Marvasti, 2004). The decision to disclose the names of the communities is not necessarily to be seen in an unethical light as one of the goals of ethical social research is to create some benefits for the participants (Christians, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Marvasti, 2004; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

Social scientists are called upon to pursue more than their professional interest to become advocates for their research communities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Thus, I believe that making the concerns of the communities known through the findings of this study will promote more academic and policy interest in the communities, which will inure to their benefit. Related to this advocacy appeal for social researchers, a number of the study participants expressed strong views on the need for me to disseminate the research findings in their communities to benefit them rather than limiting its influence to academic circles. Such requests appeal to the ethical framework of consequentialism, which is rooted in utilitarian thought (Christians, 2005; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015).

In spite of the rigour of the institutional review processes, they are not enough to ensure that due cognizance is given to all the ethical considerations required for a qualitative research project, as the context of interactions differ among the research participants. Thus, situational ethics arising from unforeseen ethical considerations due to the specific nature of the research setting became integral throughout the data gathering processes. Particularly, there was the decision to

discriminate on how the token airtime compensation was given to participants. Some of the participants invested resources in the interview, which far exceeded the value of the compensation. Additionally, some participants felt obligated to sit through the interview given the extended period I had followed up on them to arrange for an interview. Thus, when they finally consented, the interview had to be terminated at my discretion despite their consent, considering the interferences from their other ongoing activities.

The interviews were also held at the convenience of the study participants, and a token compensation of mobile phone air-time worth GHS 10.00 was given to most of the participants. The compensation was disclosed when the interview ended to limit the possibility of coercion into the study due to the expectation of a reward. Some participants, particularly those abroad, objected to the token compensation as they felt more financially privileged as migrants.

Finally, in terms of financial disclosures, I received a scholarship grant from the Erasmus Plus Mobility Programme for non-European Union students that supported my travel to Vienna and through that window my subsequent personal travel to Düsseldorf, Germany. I also received financial support for the entire research process from the Building a New Generation of Academics in Africa Project (BANGA-Africa). The grant supported my travels within Ghana and provided all the equipment and other resources needed to complete the research. The express interests of the donors were in career development, institutional advancement and networking.

### **3.8 On Reflexivity**

Given its operational standards, qualitative methodology appreciates the central role of the researcher in the whole research process and therefore places much emphasis on the need for reflexivity (Neuman, 2014; O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015). A reflexive researcher becomes aware of

her position and the potential ways that it may influence the research. The goal for some qualitative researchers would be to bracket these influences while others embrace them and rather point the users of the research output to the researcher's reflexive baggage. Given this, it is imperative to highlight how my position and values as a researcher influenced the research process. By this endeavour, I pay attention to how I became the knower and the known within the process of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

When I started the data gathering in the latter part of 2018, I was in my early 30s, unmarried with no biological children but dependents. I am a Christian, Ghanaian female and pursuing a PhD degree in a Ghanaian University. These positions I occupy were disclosed to all the participants I interacted with during the fieldwork period. The disclosure consequently shaped the context of the data gathering processes, albeit differently in the various locations.

First, when I encountered the Ghanaian community in Vienna through mostly Sunday church fellowship, I was seen as a familiar guest who needed to be entertained and informed about life abroad as a Ghanaian. Thus, the people I interacted with were eager to show me African-centred shopping malls where I could get Ghanaian groceries. The women also showed me saloons owned by West Africans where I could visit for a hairdo, and a couple of others hosted me outside the church to give me a warm reception to Vienna. My position as a student on mobility at the time was interpreted in one sense as someone who was not fully resourced financially. Therefore, I was always entertained at the expense of my Ghanaian guests. Given this, the two persons who consented to be interviewed for the study hosted me over lunch at their own expense and thus, I did not raise the need for the token financial compensation for them.

Also, when I interacted with some church council members of various nationalities – South Africans, Malaysian and Austrians – at a Christmas dinner at the invitation of the South African couple, they complimented my ability to discuss issues they found very interesting such as the subtle pushbacks against both EU and non-EU immigrants in Austria and the fluid identities of contemporary times. At the same time, they maintained that life in Austria is better than in Ghana and went as far as extending possibilities for them to adopt me to regularise my stay in Austria. These persons were much older than I was, with age gaps ranging from 12 to 20 years, and therefore saw me as their responsibility. They, therefore, alluded to more economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Additionally, the emigrants I interviewed on the phone to match the interviews of their relations in Ghana were very sympathetic to the effort of interviewing on the phone. Thus, when the calls on WhatsApp were poor due to the low quality of the internet, they willingly agreed to call back on their traditional networks despite my appeal that it was my responsibility as a researcher to bear the cost of the call. They constantly affirmed through such actions that they understood that as migrants, they are better off financially than non-migrant and therefore are in a better position to foot the cost of the call. In sum, my interactions with study participants outside of Ghana brought to the fore the various ways they demonstrated their privileged positions, either through their economic or cultural capital. Also, they showed that the context of such engagements was not always in my ambit.

In Ghana, study participants in Accra were eager to participate in the study due to our common network connections. A number of them also invited me to their homes for the interview and welcomed me with warm meals and drinks. After each interview session, they were eager to know if their responses added anything to the study and allowed me to always contact them again for

further clarifications and insights. However, unlike the participants abroad, those in Accra accepted the token financial compensation despite their reception of the interview.

In Nkoranza, the reactions of participants in the study were diverse. In some cases, people I encountered in formal settings such as the District Assembly's office, the office of the Traditional Council and the Municipal Health Insurance Office expressed admiration about my pursuit of the PhD degree. They, therefore, emphasised their willingness to support me in any way they could, given their appreciation of the extent of financial commitment required to pursue a higher degree in Ghana. This appreciation made them ready to recruit more persons into the interview and provided me with any assistance I requested. Thus, our shared experiences of the socio-economic conditions in Ghana led to their empathetic support of the fieldwork.

In contrast, some participants expressed various reservations to participate in the research because some community members were new to participating in any research. I had to rely on the intervention of the community liaison person to help them understand what the research was about before they would give their consent. In other instances, participants who were younger than I was, did not like the idea of allowing me to meet them at a time of their convenience but rather expressed their willingness to be available at my convenience. This highlights how the cultural norm of respect for elders manifested in the study. On my part, the norm was expressed in how I composed the pseudonyms. Participants older than me are addressed with kinship labels such as uncle and aunt, which express the distance between us in terms of age, while those younger or my age mates only with a pseudo-first name.

Further, on my links with migrants and how that shaped my views of transnational family life, I highlight the various ways my growing-up experiences were key to my views of transnational

family life. I grew up in a large family where my parents, seven siblings, other extended relations, and contract labourers helping out with farm work lived together as one large household. Even though my parents still live together in their retirement, most of my siblings, including myself, have left my parents' house to pursue various careers and establish their own families. The branching off from one's family of orientation to form a family of procreation is a desirable value in Ghanaian society. At a point in time, older family members are expected to leave their parents' homes to form their own families. This cultural preference emphasises why the spatial separation among extended families are less problematic than for nuclear families (Darkwah et al., 2019).

Further, I also participated in a research project by some faculty members of my university as a research assistant from 2017 to 2018, interviewing international migrants and non-migrant households in a community in Ghana. The fieldwork encounter opened my eyes to some of the contradictions of transnational family lives – enhanced material needs and limited emotional bonds; varying levels of appreciation of migration and transnational families among different factions of the community and also different members of a family; and the varying outcomes of any given migration project. This engagement with the community in general and the migrants' households, in particular, was integral to my research interest on ICT usage among transnational families.

Lastly, later on in my fieldwork process, my niece, who lived with me during her undergraduate years at the University of Ghana, travelled on a Government of Ghana scholarship to pursue a post-graduate degree abroad in the first week of September 2019. It has been over a year since she left, and I maintain active contact with her, even though she communicates more often with my younger sister, who also lives with me, as they are contemporaries. I usually interact with her through chats and less often through voice calls, all on WhatsApp's instant communication

application. However, she interacts most often with my sister via video calls. These differences in our modes of interaction emphasise how modes of contact demonstrate varying degrees of emotional bonds, as I have highlighted in chapter four of this thesis. Sometimes we shop for local groceries and send them to her through human couriers, as we communicate the details of the groceries on the phone. My interactional experiences with her add a great deal of data to my experiences of the contemporary nature of interactions in transnational families, which corroborate some of the findings from the fieldwork.

Despite my elaborate attempt to remain open as a researcher, one may question the extent to which a researcher can be reflexive, given the myriad ways our privileges and values often blind us. Crang (2002) captures this difficulty by emphasising that in the qualitative tradition, reflexivity seems to be the ‘shibboleth’ – something everyone identifies with irrespective of the practical difficulties it embodies. For example, some individual biases may be elusive to the introspective reflexive analyst. I, therefore, accept that there may be other positional influences that may not be too obvious to highlight.

### **3.9 Limitations of the Study**

Participants of the study were mainly from matrilineal backgrounds, which may have influenced their transnational experiences. Thus, future studies may attempt to replicate the study by focusing on transnational families from patrilineal backgrounds. Further, the extent to which the migrant and non-migrant samples could be matched was limited. However, this limitation was bridged by the multiple sources of data that enriched the data gathered. Expanding the numbers of matched samples remains vital to a study that focuses on sustained interactions among a familial network.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DETERMINANTS OF ICT PREFERENCE

#### 4.1 Introduction

Care practices frame the determinants of preference for particular communication technology among the participants of the study. These care practices fall broadly under three main thematic areas. First is material care which manifests in the exchange of both cash and non-cash remittances. Second is emotional care evident among relations with strong affective bonds. Last are various types of trusteeship obligations that generate transactional and customary interactions, such as marriage and funeral rites, among those with non-affective bonds. The conceptual differentiation appears firmer for interactions generating emotional care and trusteeship obligations, whereas material care crisscrosses between the two. For example, when a family member back home acts on behalf of a migrant relative to perform customary obligations related to funerals, these obligations may generate an exchange of remittances, so does trusteeship on residential building projects. Further, interactions involving relations with strong affective bonds may also generate material outcomes such as gifts to make visible a doting attitude and money for daily subsistence. However, given the centrality of remittances in the lives of migrants and their families back home, interactions that generate an exchange of remittances are discussed separately.

The processes involved in patterning those who fall into a particular care category are not clear cut. They are explained by how migrants and their non-migrant relations construct their relationships and sense of obligation. Generally, these patterns are negotiated based on the nature of the relationship before the migration project. The patterns are also influenced by the transformations those relationships go through, given and despite the migration.

When transnational families go through the processes of affirming, building and redefining the contours of their relationships, they do so through ubiquitous communication technologies. As objects of social exchanges, these technologies are embedded in one sense, in already existing patterns of (re)production (Carrier, 1990). In other words, families have always cared for each other in various ways, even when communication technologies were limited or non-existent. Therefore, ICTs are adapted to reproduce already existing social practice in the continued expression of care. At the same time, as ICTs are mediums that offer limits and possibilities (Bennett, 2010; McLuhan, 1994/1964), they also shape how transnational families care for each other. Given these, the dialectical relationship between social relations and technology becomes apparent, and this relationship bridges the limits of technological determinism (McLuhan, 1994/1964; Prensky, 2006; Tapscott, 2009) and the social constructionism perspective of technological usage (Bijker, 1995; Bijker & Pinch, 1987; Haddon, 2004; Silverstone et al., 2005). The differential usage of technologies in providing the two main care relationships lead to what I term 'high-end techno-bonds' and 'low-end techno-bonds'. These bonds demonstrate how families shape their care relationships based on the opportunities and constraints of prevailing communication technologies. In the following sections, I present a detailed analysis of how the 'high-end techno-bonds' and the 'low-end techno-bonds' are formed through multiple, contrasting, and intensified usage of particular ICT mediums. Before providing such an analysis, I detour by paying attention to the various determinants that influence the usage of particular technological mediums in providing material care, conceptualised in this context as the exchange of cash and non-cash remittances.

## 4.2 Caring through the Exchange of Remittances

Material care among transnational families is provided through the exchange of both cash and non-cash remittances. These flows are enabled by mediums, some of which pre-date ICTs. In the past, the paucity of communication technologies in sustaining transnational exchanges meant that migrants and their families primarily relied on human couriers, which is traditionally not classified as an ICT medium. The emphasis on the exchange through human couriers highlights how the limited communication technologies aided the processes involved in couriering items from one place to another. These exchanges were typically embedded within an existing network of friendship among the Ghanaian diaspora and sustained by mutual trust, which was nevertheless not without abuses. Thus, the usage of human couriers provided the occasion for migrants and their friends abroad to extend their bonds of friendship to their relations back home.

Further, the human couriers presented a cost-effective means of exchanging remittances between migrants and their families as the service was funded with mutual reciprocity. It also enabled transnational families to cope with some of the institutional limitations of the then Ghana Post and Telecommunications Company, such as accessibility constraints, inadequate sorting mechanisms, and tempering of parcels by company personnel. Uncle Agyenim, a migrant in Austria who has been abroad since the late 1970s, sheds light on how human couriers were used in the past.

There were many Ghanaians here in the past, and we also had the Ghana Union, comprising Ghanaians in Austria, which is still in existence. The unity among members of the union at the time was more robust than that it is now. Members of the union who visit Ghana from time to time became the couriers of remittances to our families in Ghana. Sometimes too, coincidentally, one could have a Ghanaian neighbour circulating news of their intended visit to Ghana or another Ghanaian in their networks. These channels served as the means for us to know whom to use to courier particular items to Ghana. Before the couriers would set off to Ghana, they would pre-inform us of their main destinations and the period they would be at such destinations. We would then arrange for our relations to meet them at any convenient destination to deliver the consignment. The arrangements were made through phone calls; I, for instance, would particularly call my nephew, who

was employed by the then Ghana Telecom, to make such arrangements. When the person returning to Ghana happens to be a very close friend. They would go the extra mile to deliver the items personally to my father in our village (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

Uncle Agyenim highlights that in the older technological epoch, the routes and transit zones of the couriers were clearly outlined to the migrants before the consignments were sent. The sender of the items was mainly responsible for relaying the relevant information to their families in Ghana to aid in their eventual receipt of the items. Such information was normally relayed to a focal person - someone within the network of relations who has easy access to the scarcely available fixed phone lines, who would then see the transfer of the items to the intended recipients.

In contemporary times, the usage of human couriers has gone through some transformations. These transformations include monetising the services and diminishing friendship and trust, which undergirded the exchanges in the past. Doris, a study participant in her early 20s, recounts how she engages with these couriers in receiving non-cash remittances from her aunt abroad.

A woman has her shop a few blocks from here; she coordinates a number of the shipments we receive from and send to our families abroad. I think she has several people dotted everywhere abroad who link up with her to provide the services. I would usually go for the shipped items from the agent and hand them over to my other aunt here in Ghana. What my aunt abroad does is that she writes her name and my name on the consignment. She would then send me a message describing the consignment's content and the expected delivery date. When the items arrive, the agent would call me, and I would go to her to receive them. When I receive the items from the agent, I call my aunt via video to verify that none of the items gets missing (Doris, 5th August 2019).

Doris' account above also emphasises that due to the commonplace nature of communication technologies, information sent along the chain on the remittances are initiated by all the parties involved in the transaction. The parties included the migrant who sends the remittance, the recipient(s) in Ghana and the courier service provider. In addition to this, elaborate details of the items are provided to show proof of receipt or proof of sending. These elaborations are sometimes

provided with a video call, as Doris highlights. Thus, given the increased availability and multimodal interfaces of contemporary communication technologies, how remittances are sent have been transformed. One of the critical transformations Doris' accounts highlight is the multiplicity of contacts regarding the information on the remittances sent. Other notable transformations also have to do with what is sent, its quantum and frequency.

Additionally, the multiple connections serve as accountability points, ensuring that none of the shipped items is diverted. Thus, even though accountability checks have always been part of human social interactions, how they are done presently lends more credence to technological innovations. The innovations have reduced the cost of interactions and provided a multiplicity of contact mediums – voice text, video and their various combinations.

In addition to the contemporary uses of human couriers, transnational families in recent times also rely on mobile money transfers, formal door-to-door shipping services, and institutions such as banks and non-bank financial institutions when sending or receiving material care. The choice of a particular medium to use is shaped by one's position in the transnational space, whether as a migrant abroad or a non-migrant relative in the homeland. Despite the noted mutual exchange of resources among transnational families, there is still considerable inequalities in the resource endowments, and consequently, the nature and densities of the exchanges (Levitt, 2001b; Mazzucato, 2009). Family members in the homeland primarily provide services on behalf of those abroad, and in most cases, the financial cost of the services is borne by the migrants (Mazzucato, 2009). Thus, although the idea of 'reverse remittances' (Mazzucato, *ibid*) connotes some degree of reciprocity in the exchange of material care among transnational families, migrants demonstrate significant economic capital than their non-migrant relations (Tazanu, 2015). This conclusion brings migration to the fore as a means to economic advancement (Tiemoko, 2004). In spite of the

potential of migration to lead to economic advancement, not all migrants achieve that goal, leading to their vulnerability and increased dependence on their relations back home (Adiku, 2018). Therefore, the layered outcomes of the migration/economic advancement debates challenge social scientists to pay attention to the context of their research and the meanings and interpretations of their research data. Thus, the data from this study emphasise the economic advancement thesis of migration and therefore highlights the increased flow of remittances from migrants to non-migrant families. Further, migration engenders identity transformations that rupture some of the normative prescriptions underscored by gender, age, and social status (Darkwah et al., 2016; Manuh, 1999; Nieswand, 2014). Given these tendencies, irrespective of the age, gender, or social status before migration, migrants gain much leverage that enables them to influence many outcomes in their families, including how remittances are transferred.

In instances where the flow of remittances is from non-migrant relations in Ghana to those abroad, their migrant relations abroad still control the particular medium used in the transfers. In addition to the use of human couriers, which has already been examined, non-migrant relations send remittances to their relations abroad through shipping services adapted to suit the unequal resource endowments in the transnational space. Owusuaa, a participant of the study in her late 20s whose husband of one year, is an immigrant in China, explains in the quotation below how these special shipping services work:

Several non-migrant relations in Ghana use door-to-door shipping services to transport goods such as herbal medicine, local foods, and spices to China and vice versa. Whenever my husband demands that he needs local groceries, I buy all his requested items on our local market and take them to the agents of the shipping services. These services are dotted across Accra, and so he would inform me which particular one I should use based on how easily he can get to their agency from his province. I do not pay any cost for the shipment at my end. What I do is that I send him a soft copy of the receipts through WeChat. When the consignment which is shipped as air-cargo arrives, the agency in China would call him

and deliver to his address, and he would pay the price based on the weight of the consignment (Owusuaa, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019)

Unlike other formal shipping services such as DHL, where the consignor pays for the cost of consignment before delivery, these agencies allow room for the economically endowed partner to pay before or after delivery. These services, most of which are micro transnational businesses owned by Ghanaians, understand the dynamics of inequality embedded in the transnational space and tailor their services to maximize their gains. The growth of micro transnational businesses and trade networks between Ghana and other destination regions has recently increased. The literature has noted that this growth is supported by ICT technologies and migrant transnational networks (Nkrumah, 2018; Obeng, 2014, 2017). Nkrumah (2018), for example, highlights how Ghanaian immigrants in Canada use networks of families and friends and social media technologies to sustain various forms of culturally embedded micro-enterprises. These enterprises provide a needed linkage among transnational families in their exchange of material care. Nevertheless, the contours of the linkages are further shaped by relations abroad as they decide on available shipping services that they or their relations in the homeland would use to exchange care.

The influence of migrants is further elaborated by Auntie Veronica, a participant of the study in her early 50s whose husband has been abroad for more than 18 years:

That's how the migrants are. You'll be there, and he'll call you telling you to go to so and so to withdraw money. You can't say anything about it. Currently, he sends us money through Ghana Commercial Bank. So that's what happens. He tells me where to go to withdraw the money, and I do that. He usually looks at the bank close to him. At a point, he was directing me to a particular person. (Auntie Veronica, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019)

The influence of relations abroad, which Auntie Veronica emphasises in the phrase 'you can't say anything about it', is rooted in the unequal availability of resources in the transnational space, which puts migrants in a privileged position with the power to influence how decisions are taken.

It is essential to point out that the unequal flow of resources within the transnational space is not gendered as wives also demonstrate greater control in deciding which means to use in sending remittances to their husbands back home in Ghana. The quotation below from Fred, whose wife of three years, is abroad, illustrates the foregoing discussions:

If it is money, it depends; if I need it and she knows I need it, she sends some to me. For example, when my dad passed away or when he was on admission at the hospital, I would communicate to her that ‘Dad is sick, blah blah blah, he is in the hospital’, and she would respond that ‘Okay, I am going to send you some money. She has an uncle here in Ghana who keeps some of her money, even before we met. This uncle keeps the dollars that she doesn’t want to spend, as her financial reserve, so that if she wants to send somebody money in Ghana, she would tell me that ‘I have sent this money to Uncle B, you can go and pick it up. When I get time, I pass by his place and pick it up. If it is a gift, once in a while, her people come down, she’s got her uncle, her parents so that she can prepare a package for me. So, it has always been through people. (Fred, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019)

The account of Fred above demonstrates that transnational families disrupt a number of the gendered normative practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Manuh, 1999; Parreñas, 2005), as wives become active sources of funds for activities in the families.

Another determinant of medium preference in exchanging material resources is the legal status of relations abroad. Irregular migrants do not usually engage with formal institutions in their destination countries for fear of arrest and deportation because of their undocumented status. They sometimes face police swoops as they go about their daily routines in their destination regions. In my interactions with two church council members in Vienna, Austria, they pointed out that a few days before our meeting, the city police had visited the church premises to trace someone they suspected had overstayed his visa. They were quick to emphasise that the church was the first point of contact because, as an English-speaking congregation in German-speaking Austria, about sixty per cent of its membership are Anglophone Africans – particularly from Ghana and Nigeria, and therefore serves as a hotspot to begin a search. Given this, irregular migrants consciously maintain

a hidden identity as much as possible to avoid being arrested. Therefore, they are more likely to send remittances home through human couriers or the informal ‘swap’ mobile money transfer system. In highlighting one of the ways irregular migrant relations send ‘swap’ mobile money, Sarpongmaa, a study participant in her 30s whose husband of three years is abroad, explained that:

My husband gives, say, 200 Euros to his friend abroad, and that friend would call his wife here in Ghana to send the cedi equivalent of the 200 Euros to me on mobile money. I receive the money transfer alert on my mobile money wallet, and I go to a merchant to withdraw the money (Sarpongmaa, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

The processes involved in the transfer of remittance described above by Sarpongmaa are made possible due to the expansion of financial transactions popularised by mobile money services in Ghana since 2009. This service enables both registered and unregistered users who have active mobile phone numbers to receive and send money wherever they are in the country. Several banks, both in Ghana and abroad, have built platforms that link personal accounts to the mobile money wallets of the account owners. This innovation, therefore, enables both migrants abroad and their relations in Ghana to use the mobile money transfer service with funds from their bank accounts. Thus, mobile money wallets can be loaded with funds from a linked bank account or mobile money merchants. Unlike the bank accounts, the merchants have limited jurisdiction of operations, which implies that the migrants can only load the wallets through their bank accounts. However, irregular migrants do not have the legal identity needed to open bank accounts in their destination regions. When they desire to use the mobile money transfer service, they use the ‘swap’ system described by Sarpongmaa above. Irregular migrants, therefore, have taken advantage of the availability of this service to circumvent some of the constraints they face in dealing with formal channels of sending and receiving remittances.

In other instances, irregular migrants ‘buy’ formal identities from other migrant friends or family members to transact businesses with the formal remitting institutions and sustain their lives abroad in diverse ways. In an interview with Abena, a study participant in her early 30s whose husband is abroad, she emphasised that: ‘My husband’s official name in Ghana is ‘A’, however over there, because of the papers he uses, which he acquired from the person who assisted him to migrate, he is called ‘B’,’ (31<sup>st</sup> July 2019). Thus, the formal institutions are not entirely off-limits for irregular migrants. However, in both the ‘swap’ system and the ‘buying’ of proxy identities, irregular migrants become exposed to unnecessary closure to third parties who may exploit their vulnerabilities.

In contrast, regular migrants have at their disposal both formal and informal means of transfer. They can decide to choose from among the gamut of options available without any restraint and apprehensions. In the quote below, Ashiatu, a participant of the study whose husband is a regular migrant, highlights how she coordinated with him to plan for their marriage ceremony when he was still abroad:

When we were planning for our wedding, my husband sent the money required to purchase the items needed for the dowry. He sent them through Ria Money Transfer Service. He usually would send me a snapshot of the information sheet needed to receive the money via WhatsApp. I would have even shown you one of the snapshots if my phone were to be around. He also bought some items and sent them to us through his aunt, who visited Ghana before the event (Ashiatu, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

Ashiatu’s husband’s regular status gives him the privilege to use both formal and informal mediums of sending remittances to his wife. The privilege emphasises that a social actor’s usage of communication technologies is constructed based on a myriad of conditions, in this particular case, one’s legal migration status.

At the same time, Ashiatu's narration reveals how contemporary communication technologies have transformed her husband's mode of communicating the information on the remittance. Her husband chooses to send a snapshot of the receipt of the money transfer on WhatsApp. In the older technological epoch, a brief telephone call or a short messaging service (SMS) would have been used for such purposes. This process of sending the snapshot is fast and reveals more information than may be relevant for retrieving the remittance sent. Information such as the time the sender sent the money, the specific location of the remitting institution, among others, can all be seen on the snapshot. This extra background information can be relied upon to draw further conclusions about her husband – which he may not have noticed from the innocuous act of using a faster means to communicate with his wife.

Therefore, this means that communication technologies as 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2010) or as mediums that change the 'ecology' (Postman, 1992) of our socio-cultural world impinge on social actors based on their design qualities. Even though designing a technological artefact is a socio-political process (Bijker, 1995; Bijker & Pinch, 1987), unintended consequences of the end product separate some of the far-reaching influence of technology from social and political processes alone (Postman, 1992).

In sum, migrants have access to more resources than their families in the origin countries, and therefore, they have greater leverage in the transnational space. This leverage positions them to influence which particular mediums are used in the sending and receipt of remittances. Given these unequal resource endowments, when families in the origin countries send mainly non-cash remittances to their relations abroad, they rely on services tailored to fit the unequal resource endowments. Relations in the origin countries often use human couriers that are operated on a network of trust and mutual obligations or semi-formal micro shipping enterprises that absolve

financial obligations off their shoulders. Further, the legal status of migrants also shapes how they choose particular mediums. Irregular migrants, unlike their regular counterparts, need to maintain a low public profile to minimise their chances of arrest and deportation. They are more likely to use informal channels such as human couriers to send remittances with its current transformations. Regular migrants, on the other hand, have fewer apprehensions in using formal channels such as MoneyGram, Ria Money Transfer, bank wiring, among others, in addition to the informal channels. These social indicators that shape how transnational families adapt to particular communication technologies underscore the social constructionism perspective. At the same time, the inherent architecture of particular technologies presents constraints and possibilities for social actors, which transform how information related to material care is provided.

### **4.3 ‘High-End Techno-Bonds’: Care among Relations with Affective Bonds**

The scope of the care practices by transnational families extends beyond material exchanges through remittances. The scope also includes sharing immaterial bonds of attachments, where care is expressed through varied constant and heightened interactions leading to what I term ‘high-end techno-bonds’. Interactions that generate ‘high-end techno-bonds’ are characterised by frequent and intense exchanges that are usually stretched out throughout the day. The frequent and intense exchanges are achieved by the use of multiple mediums based on their peculiar offerings. In the quotation below, Ashiatu, in her early 30s, highlights the frequency of her interactions with her husband in the USA despite the distance:

Ooh, when you came, I was even on the phone with him. He calls me very often just to check up on me. When we were dating, he used to call me as many as six times a day! Moreover, anytime he calls me, he would ask me about my mother, her health and her well-being. Even now that we are married, he calls me very often. Sometimes, when he calls

me, I would have to excuse myself to sleep. Because of the stage of the pregnancy, I do not have the strength to stay up for long hours. Right now, it is 5 pm here. It would be 10 am, or 11 am over there. He would be at work right now, so he would call me to check on me to see how I am faring when he gets free time. We usually talk about how we miss each other, our future together and how we plan to raise our kids. We also make plans on how to manage our finances (Ashiatu, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

Further, Mama Nina, a participant of the study in her 60s and retired, who has her unmarried son abroad, shares the ways they provide emotional care to each other:

I talk to my son all the time on WhatsApp calls. Anytime he calls me, I answer him. I have taken it to be that I don't go to work over here, and I don't have anywhere to go now, so anytime my son calls me, I would answer his calls, but I know when to call him given his schedules. When I get the opportunity to talk to him, I always advise him that 'where you are, you don't have your father or mother with you, so be very careful of how you conduct yourself.' I also tell him to be careful with the kind of friends he makes, the kinds of conversations he engages in, you understand, and to find a church to fellowship (Mama Nina, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The two quotes above from Mama Nina and Ashiatu illustrate that relations with highly effective bonds express a keen interest in each other's affairs, resulting in frequent and prolonged conversations. In this way, study participants expressed a higher preference for technologies that enable them to communicate using data bundles over the internet instead of traditional telecommunications mediums because of cost considerations. John, a male participant in his early 30s, emphasises that 'I can buy internet bundles for WhatsApp call at say GHS 2 or GHS 1, and with that, I can talk for about an hour or two and the internet bundle would still not be exhausted' (17<sup>th</sup> April 2019). John's account is further corroborated by my own experience in Vienna, Austria. I walked into the retail office of Hutchison Drei Austria GmbH, a telecommunications company, to buy a SIM card to facilitate my interactions with my family in Ghana and colleagues in Vienna. As the salesperson at the shop assessed my needs as a user, he advised that it would be cheaper for me to use their data package to make WhatsApp calls than to call directly from the *3 Austria* network.

Even though I have established in Chapter Five that contemporary communication mediums are relatively cheap compared to the older technological epoch, the cost is still a key concern for two reasons. First, anyone has a reasonably large number of persons in their routine contact list, which collectively creates a colossal amount of time spent on phone calls, with its attendant increased cost. Second, the discussions' depth is more detailed now than previously, leading to more time spent in the interactions. These unending and embellished talks add to the thrill of the interactions but lead to additional costs. Therefore, the cheaper rates of internet-based applications reduce the cost of interactions, enabling relations to stay in touch with each other continuously.

Another way that the 'high-end techno-bond' users get around the increased cost of their interactions occasioned by their frequent and prolonged usage of the communication technologies is that relations that are well resourced typically finance the interactions. Thus, some relations in the origin regions that share affective bonds with specific relations abroad emphasised that they receive airtime and data bundles. There are current innovations that facilitate these transfers in the service provisioning of a number of the traditional telecommunication service providers. In 2019, for example, MTN Group Limited – a South African multinational mobile telecommunications company with a majority market share in Ghana, launched an application known as 'MTN Homeland' that targets the African diaspora in Europe and the UK. The application facilitates mobile money and airtime transfers from these overseas destinations to some African countries, including Ghana (Olupot, 2020).

The continuous contact further solidifies the bond of affection, thereby leading to an endless feel of the presence of one another. Given this ability of contemporary media, Baldassar (2016) calls attention to the need to re-evaluate the assumption that physical co-presence is the gold standard for interactions, particularly among families. She nevertheless recognises the limits, especially

when caring through physical touch and crisis care such as severe illness. The critical threshold that sustains transnational interactions then depends not only on technological affordability but also on conditions such as the type of kinship bond, the length of stay abroad, ability and frequency of visits and reunification plans. These other factors influence how relations value or despise the absence-presence created by contemporary technologies (Darkwah et al., 2019).

Further, Gergen (2004), in his work on how media and technology affect interpersonal relationships, uses the concept of 'absent presence' to highlight how interactions involving physical co-presence can be further fraught. A notable instance is where the attention of one or the other person remains glued to a mobile phone in a way that makes the physical body absent from the ongoing physical interactions. Given this, physical co-presence in itself does not become a sufficient condition for effective interaction. Consequently, neither physical co-presence nor the mediated presence enabled by the ubiquitous contemporary technologies is sufficient conditions to conclude on the effectiveness of transnational interactions.

Transnational families nevertheless use the multiple modes of contact enabled by contemporary technologies to build and sustain a desire to be constantly in touch with each other. The 'polymedia' (Madianou & Miller, 2012a, 2012b) environment enables relations to adapt their ongoing activities and programmes in their physical environment to their frequent virtual interactions. In the quotation below, Martin, a male in his mid-thirties with his wife of five years abroad, highlights that:

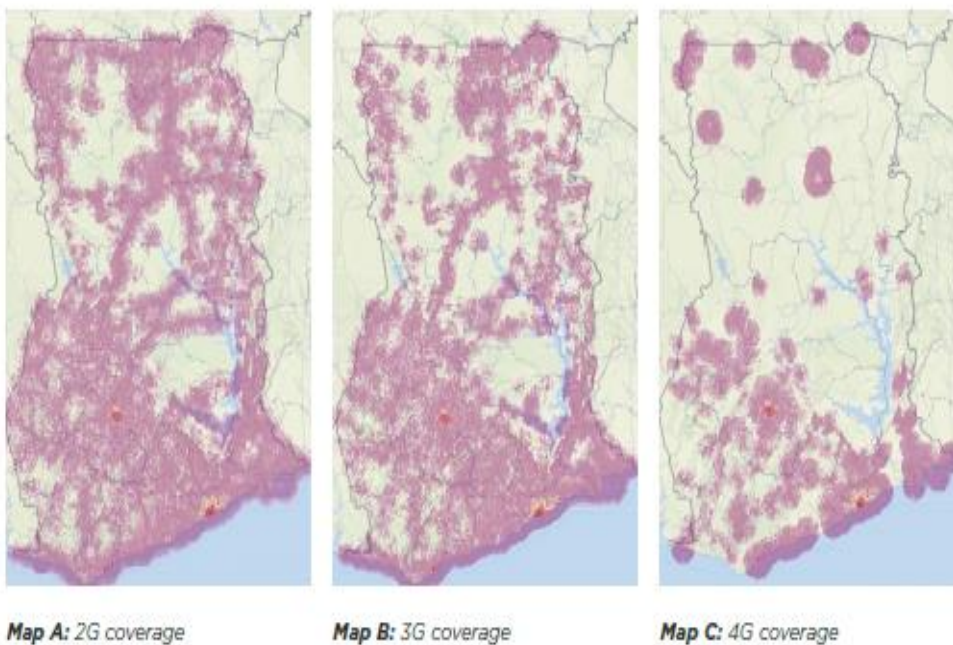
We chat frequently, and the text helps us to deal with our time differences. I send her text messages on WhatsApp anytime I wake up in the morning to say 'hi' while she is asleep due to [the] time difference. When she wakes up, she responds, and we chat a little bit before she goes to work in the morning. Also, what she likes is voice calls, whether on WhatsApp or through a mobile network provider. When she calls me on voice, she could be driving to work, and we could chat all the way, as she puts the phone on loudspeaker in

her car. At other times too, we do video calls to feel what is going on in each other's physical environment. All that she needs is that I am free and available to talk. In such instances, many things come up. I have realised that for most of our serious conversations, we use voice calls. (Martin, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019)

Martin's account above reveals how his affective bond is expressed in his virtual interactions with his wife. First, he emphasizes using an asynchronous text medium to establish a first contact that recognises the time differences between him and his wife. Even though this first contact does not result in immediate feedback, it is no less critical. It conveys a needed message to the wife that her husband can perform a regular routine. Expectedly, the wife's routine is also to respond to the text, which subsequently shapes the flow of their interactions throughout the day. These routines establish in the consciousness of the couple that everything is all right. An otherwise break in the routine creates anxiety and stress. The anxiety in some instances occasions the incidence of what Mahler (2001) termed as 'transnational imagination' – the tendency to fill the imaginative gap created by 'prolonged' lack of communication with all sorts of ideas, particularly of infidelity and also possible arrest where the person is an illegal immigrant. Later on, in their daily interactional routine, the asynchronous medium is transformed into a synchronous medium given the portability of the mobile phone with an internet connection and an internet-based application – WhatsApp. The contemporary offerings of the mobile phone facilitate what Martin refers to as 'chat'. The peak of their interactions takes place through a voice medium which he reports provides the avenue for them to have what he describes as 'most of our serious conversations'. This account shows how technology as a medium of interaction is used to provide 'ontological security' – a psychological sense of confidence and stability derived from our everyday routines and self-identity (Giddens, 1991). Also, it determines the intensity of the message conveyed through the particular medium used.

In addition to voice and text-based mediums, relations with affective bonds also use video calls when the internet bandwidth is strong enough to enable it. Generally, video calls require significant data bytes, and the quality of the call is best when the available infrastructure supports the 4<sup>th</sup> generation (4G) of broadband technologies. However, the infrastructural provision of 4G – seen from the map in Figure 4.0 below, is concentrated in the southern part of Ghana while the middle and northern parts remain largely uncovered (Karlsson & Cruz, 2018).

**Figure 4.0: Maps of Ghana’s 2G, 3G and 4G Mobile Network**



**Source: GSMA Mobile Coverage Maps (Karlsson & Cruz, 2018, p. 14)**

The unequal provisioning of the 4G infrastructure is at the backdrop that 4G technology became commercially available in Ghana only recently in 2016 when MTN, the largest mobile telecommunications operator, acquired the license in December 2015 (Anibrika & Gavua, 2017). As a commercial product, the supply of mobile infrastructure is driven by demand. Therefore, in areas where the demand for the service is low, the profit incentive diminishes. Thus, industry players may be unwilling to invest in the high cost of infrastructure provisioning. The consequence

is that users in areas with low demand experience low quality of service. Thus, between the study areas in Ghana, participants located in densely populated areas of Accra enjoyed better service than those in sparsely populated peri-urban Accra and Nkoranza. Further, migrant participants, given the rate of infrastructural development in the destination regions, experience the best services. Tilly, a study participant in her early 40s who was interviewed in Vienna, contrasts her experiences with communication technologies between her origin country of Ghana and her destination of Austria:

In Vienna, I do not experience any voice drops when we interact. However, when I am in Ghana, the quality of the call is not always good; thus, I sometimes encounter interruptions in the calls due to these things (Tilly, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

These dynamics underscore the digital divide, which determines those who can freely participate in the digital world and those excluded due primarily to macro-level constraints. Despite this, however, when video calls are made among relations with affective bonds, it enables them to share their experiences by extending one's self and physical location across boundaries. In the quotation below, Wisdom, a 37-year-old man with extended relations abroad, highlights the appeal of video-based mediums:

When you talk with someone, sometimes the person can hear your voice but would be interested in seeing your face. You know we have something that we say that when you see someone's face when interacting with the person, you have more reverence for the person than when you are talking on a voice call. You can talk with someone on a voice call, and as the interaction prolongs, the conversations could be problematic. However, when he talks with you on video, you can see him laugh, like that kind of thing. Even though you can hear the person laugh when the call is a voice call, for video calls, the person can see your environment and participate in that environment. For example, he would say, 'ooh, are these your children? Let me talk to Nana Kwadwo'. Sometimes, the person calling on video could be nostalgic about his family member and would like to see his face (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

The account of Wisdom above shows that when relations communicate on video, the mere fact of visibility can reduce the tendency for the interactions to go awry given tensed emotions. The

visibility, therefore, introduces some degree of reverence which acts as a buffer against negative emotions. This conclusion may be true, particularly when the relationship is hierarchical. Additionally, the external environment becomes an active referential part of the interactions when video-based mediums are used. Wisdom, for example, emphasises that his relations abroad can interact with his children because they may be visible in the background of the video call. Fred, whose wife of three years lives in the USA, also highlights how their video call enables him to share his wife's daily experiences.

Due to our technological advantage over previous eras, we can link up via video calls. Sometimes, for example, she would tell me that she has done this new hairstyle which I would like to see, because if she were here with me, naturally, I would have seen her. So, the best thing is to go in for a WhatsApp video call, so I try and video call, and I see her and admire her and all that. So, it makes me feel like the person is right by me because I can feel what the person is doing, what the person is wearing, or how she is looking like, or if she has gotten something new. We could have a video call, and she would show me that she has just bought this thing, blah blah blah. Once she decided to rent a place, we had a video call where she showed me each room, so it was almost like I was walking her through the rooms seeing what she was trying to do. So, I feel some of those things are best experienced if I were there, but once I am not there, I can still be part of her experiences when we interact through video calls (Fred, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

Fred highlights that when he communicates via video calls with his wife, he is able to participate in her environment as if he was there in person with her. To Fred, this type of co-presence is good enough to deal with their spatial separation. This video calls feature has somewhat become a means of surveillance in transnational interactions (Hannaford, 2015).

Video calls are also used when relations interact with very young children who have not fully acquired mastery over language. It also helps to create an intimate bond with children who were left behind at a tender age. In the quotation below, Auntie Veronica recounts how her husband, who has been abroad for 19 years, uses video calls to communicate with his daughter, whom he left behind at a tender age.

He usually calls on video when his daughter is at home. When he migrated, she was very young, so he does the video call to see his daughter's face. He can't see her face with just the WhatsApp voice call. (Auntie Veronica, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019)

The advances in communication technologies have no doubt introduced more vibrancy to transnational interactions. The vibrancy allows relations to express various forms of emotions with technology. Baldassar (2008) highlights the various ways transnational families' emotions of 'nostalgia' are demonstrated through words, practices, ideas and embodied experiences such as tears or smiles. These varied demonstrations gain meaningful expressions through contemporary communication technologies and bring transnational families' affective lives to the fore.

Additionally, high-end techno bond users of communication technology show increased usage and heightened interactions during periods of crisis. In a personal crisis, such as divorce or illness, the person affected requires much care - emotional, material, and physical touch, thus reaching out to significant others for such support. In the quotation below, Janet, a study participant in her early 30s, highlights how her divorced brother constantly keeps in touch with her:

We usually do WhatsApp calls, and he is the one who mostly calls me, given the line of his work as a taxi driver. Every morning he calls me on video. Sometimes when he goes to work and an interesting incident happens, he calls on the video for me to see the incident. There was a particular time I noticed that I had not heard from him for about three days. I got worried and decided to call him to check on him, but a stranger answered the phone and narrated how my brother blacked out while driving his taxi and obstructed traffic flow. The stranger was the Good Samaritan who came to my brother's rescue, took him to the hospital and cared for him until he got well. (Let me show you some of the pictures he sent me on his hospital bed). He later informed me that they are very lonely over there and do not have anybody to talk to, so that is why they get in touch very often. He also advised that if we have not heard from him for about two days, we should call him to check on him. Perhaps a mishap might have occurred. He lives alone with his children following his divorce from his wife, and they do not have anyone else (Janet, In-depth Interview, 2019).

Janet emphasises that his brother's vulnerabilities as a divorcee cause him to heighten his interactions with her - his younger sister, who has become his confidante. She also highlights his preference for video calls, which has a multi-sensory appeal, thereby increasing the 'emotional

energy' that he would derive from the interactions (Collins, 2004). In a related quotation below, Tilly, a Ghanaian resident who was interviewed in Vienna, emphasises how her regular interactions with her brother-in-law in Italy has intensified given his marital crisis:

I interact with my brother-in-law every day following his separation from his wife. Anytime he comes home from work, he becomes so vulnerable as he feels the void created by the absence of his wife and only daughter. The wife took their daughter away following their separation. There are times my husband, who happens to be his elder brother, even gets jealous that I am giving his younger brother more attention than I give him! We call each other to help him cope with all the difficulties he is going through now (Tilly, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

The susceptibility of families abroad to an emotional crisis is heightened when their social support abroad is weak. Thus, migrants find particular relations back home as helpful companions throughout their migration project. When they are in crisis, they reach out to them. This does not mean that relations back home do not equally depend on their migrant relations for emotional support. In some instances, some children back home depend on their migrant parents for such support (Parreñas, 2003, 2005). However, relations in the homeland have a broader pool of kin and friendship networks than migrants do abroad. Even though regular migrants face a crisis, its incidence among irregular migrants is generally higher as their irregular status becomes the basis of a number of the crises they face (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Tanle, 2012). Given this, irregular migrants, more than their regular counterparts, are more likely to interact with particular relations back home, given their susceptibility to the crisis.

In a nutshell, relations with affective bonds produce 'high-end techno-bonds' as they engage in seemingly unending interactions with contemporary communication technologies. Their preferences for voice-based mediums are due to the immediacy effect and the reported closeness they engender. Further, video calls are used to share experiences. Also, text-based mediums such as WhatsApp chats and short messaging services stretch the interactions over different time zones

and schedules, enabling active interactions throughout the day. However, when ‘high-end techno-bonds’ are (re) produced, specific mediums are selected based on what they offer and not merely that it helps these families to stay in touch. Therefore, when a choice is made for video calls, those interacting desire more than just oral communication. They desire to extend their physical environment to the other. Such an experience is not merely produced by the constructive agency of the users but also by the peculiar offering of the medium.

Further, the frequency and intensity of the interactions and the ability of current technologies to produce what Vertovec (2004) highlights as ‘cheap calls’ lead to the high emotional arousal of transnational families. Thus, as social actors build emotional bridges across the transnational space, they do so through the structures created by communication technologies. Finally, to the ‘relevant social group’ of ‘high-end techno bond’ users, contemporary communication technologies are constructed as mediums for building strong emotional bonds (Bijker & Pinch, 1987). Overall, the bonds created through communication technologies can exist among all categories of kin and irrespective of one’s legal migration status. However, interactions are heightened among irregular migrants and their families in the homeland in periods of crisis.

#### **4.4 ‘Low End-Techno Bonds’: Care among Relations with non-Affective Bonds**

Transnational relations with non-affective bonds engage in various forms of trusteeship obligations for one another. Some of these obligations relate to the care of children left behind, oversight responsibilities on the construction of residential properties or income-earning ventures. Fulfilling the obligations generates flows of interactions. Here, the focus of the interactions is not necessarily on the expression of emotions such as nostalgia but instead on the required obligations. How

communication technologies are used among relations that provide trusteeship care produce a 'low-end techno-bond'. This bond is generated given the activity-centred interactions. In subsequent sections, I shed more light on how relations with non-affective bonds use the different media in different contexts to produce a 'low-end techno-bond'.

Interactions among relations with non-affective bonds tend to be specific and do not require much time unless very detailed accounts or reports are required. Thus, greater preference is given to voice mediums given the instantaneous feedback and the limited time required to initiate and complete a voice call. Cudjoe, in his early 40s who lives with his nuclear family abroad and had visited Ghana at the time of the interview, expresses his preference for voice-enabled mediums in the following words:

I don't have time. If you send me a text message, I won't mind you. I don't like those WhatsApp things. It's because when I buy call credit from my mobile telecommunications providers, I can call you, and we will talk about what we need to talk about. As for the video call, there are interruptions here and there. The least thing and the network will be off, so I don't need to make a video call. And so, I use traditional communication networks (Cudjoe, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019).

Cudjoe's account reveals his preference for voice calls alternatives that have better service quality. Given the poor internet infrastructure, traditional telecommunications networks provide better call services than internet-based mediums, even though the former comes with a higher cost. The limited-time spent in a particular conversation implies that the 'low-end techno-bond' users often choose the services of the traditional telecommunications networks. However, a residual outcome of this desire is that because of the economic privilege of the migrants, they are often the initiators of the calls. This outcome is also informed by the widely held view among relations in the homeland that the traditional telecommunications networks offer relatively expensive services. Unlike the 'high-end techno-bond' users, where relations abroad can send them airtime to reduce

the cost burden, such direct support is minimised among the ‘low-end techno-bond’ users. The minimised support is not to reduce the normative reciprocal exchange principle among transnational families but rather to highlight that the level of support among relations with an affective bond is more encompassing than those without such bonds. Thus, even though non-migrant family members are more likely to get in touch with Cudjoe using an internet-based application such as WhatsApp, his account illustrates that he is not likely to respond, and more so if it is a text. Thus, among the ‘low-end techno-bond’ users, the expectation of interactions may be different, and these differences limit the extent to which they can have access to each other.

Further, apart from the desire for instantaneous feedback and to keep the interactions concise, the content of the message also influences the usage of voice-based mediums. Boakye, a 42-year-old who has a brother abroad, emphasizes that:

My brother in Libya, for instance, has a wife and children here. That means he has to take care of them. Every month, he provides for their upkeep. It’s either he sends them money monthly for the wife to be able to take care of the children, or sometimes the wife may call him and inform him of a need, which may be financial or customary, and so he will call me to stand in for him and perform what his wife requests. It may be a funeral in the wife’s family, or he may request that I loan her money to meet some emergency. Those are the kinds of things he may need me to do for him as if he were here physically (Boakye, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The account by Boakye above illustrates that sometimes an occasion for the interaction may be non-routine care such as a funeral or the provisioning of an emergency backup support. In such instances, the need to foreground the request in the context of situational incidents that have brought about the inability of the socially designated person to meet his normative obligation has to be highlighted. Such foregrounding is rooted in the culture of oratory that governs informal communication - ‘ammanεεbo’ (translated as ‘telling a mission’) among the Akans (Yankah,

1991). Therefore, the normative structure of ‘*ammaneebo*’ provides extra length to the content of the interactions, making the usage of voice-based mediums more desirable.

An additional cultural impetus that promotes the usage of voice-based mediums is the central place of oral communication in Ghana (Assimeng, 1997; Yankah, 1991) as an indigenous form of interactions and transmitting knowledge in a context of low levels of literacy. Given this backdrop, participants of the study often noted that rather than sending text messages to their migrant relations when they are unavailable for instantaneous interactions, they often send voice notes. Yaa-Yaa, in her late 20s, co-interviewed with her grandmother, commented on some of the means they use to interact with her aunt abroad:

After migrating abroad, she got herself educated, and so she can write now. So, she is now able to WhatsApp with us. At other times, when she wants to talk to her mum but doesn’t get to her when she calls, she sends us voice notes which we, in turn, listen to and give her feedback (Yaa-Yaa, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

The quotation above from Yaa-Yaa reveals some dynamics in her interactional processes with her aunt. First, she emphasises that when her aunt migrated, she had the opportunity to be educated, which afforded her the ability to read and write, and she could, therefore ‘WhatsApp’. To ‘WhatsApp’, as used by study participants, means interacting through text-based chats on WhatsApp. Migrants, as part of cultural immersion programmes of their destination countries, go through some period of language literacy programmes. These programmes and the generally increased opportunities for education in developed destination regions place migrants among those who can use text-based mediums. Lastly, Yaa-Yaa elaborates that voice notes become a viable alternative to using text-based mediums when communicating with an illiterate such as her grandmother. Boakye, a 42-year-old key informant of the study, sheds further light on the place of voice notes in transnational interactions.

Voice note is where you want to send a message that you don't need an immediate response. It's the same with text messages. But that's if you can type (Boakye, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

When Boakye refers to the statement 'if you can type', he highlights the place of literacy in informing one's ability to send text messages. Thus, persons who cannot type would not send text messages but use voice notes to send asynchronous information. Yaa-Yaa notes that the manifestation of illiteracy in the transnational space is varied, with migrants having a lower propensity to be illiterate. Among their relatives in Ghana, there are regional variations in illiteracy rates (GSS, 2019), as I have indicated in Chapter Five. Thus, those in Accra are more literate than those in Nkoranza.

While the constraints of illiteracy affect both 'high-end techno-bond' and 'low-end techno-bond' users, there are marked differences in how the asynchronous medium of voice notes are used. Apart from the general usage pattern of arranging for a more opportune time to make a voice call, 'high-end techno-bond' users use voice notes or text to spread their interactions across a longer time frame – throughout the whole day. On the other hand, 'low-end techno-bond' users use the same medium when they share a more extended depth of information at a go. A reason for this usage pattern is that 'high-end techno-bond' users place more premium on their interactions with each other than the 'low-end techno-bond' users.

Again, given that literacy rates vary among transnational families, those who can read and write among the 'low-end techno-bond' users sometimes use email as they believe it offers more security and enables one to share an extensive text-based report. Nat, a male participant in his early 40s who has his wife and uncle abroad, explains below why he sometimes resorts to emails:

I think it is one, the sensitivity of what you're talking about. Sometimes there is the feeling that certain things cannot be sent on platforms you're not sure about regarding the security

around them. For instance, I'll prefer to send a pin to an ATM card or whatever through a secured email platform. If I'm sending it to his email at the office and through my email at the office, it is a bit more secure than just putting it on the WhatsApp platform. So that's one. The second is the data quantum. Not all things can be said on WhatsApp. It may be so long. With such a thing, an email option together with a link to what you're talking about will make it easier than sending it on WhatsApp (Nat, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

Wisdom, a male participant of the study in his late 30s with a brother-in-law abroad, also shows the conditions under which they use emails in their interactions:

It depends on the content. Sometimes, when we discuss land and land document matters, my brother-in-law would usually say, 'Wisdom, I would send an email to you to see the whole thing well'. ...he would ask me of the details, 'oh, how far have you gotten to on the sale of the land?' and I would respond, 'I have inspected the land in the company of the police. The chiefs are saying that...' and he would say, 'ooh, don't worry''. The next moment he would send me documents on the land via email (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

Even though now WhatsApp has functionalities that allow the sharing of documents, participants' preference for emails is informed by concerns for security and also by the volume of text involved in the interactions. The proliferation of spyware has made digital security a thorny issue (Castells et al., 2007; Silva, 2018). Further, for employees who use office Wi-Fi or computers for personal communication, the employers' monitoring gaze on the network minimises one's security (Sacacas, 2020). These tendencies may pose a high risk of digital spying for people who feel the particular digital platform they are using is reasonably secured. This notwithstanding, emails are rated more secured among 'low-end techno-bond' users. Therefore, they use it whenever security is required and when they desire to share a larger quantum of text.

Video calls are also a preferred medium among the 'low-end techno-bond' users. However, in this context, the focus is not to share experiences but to provide proof of the progress of an assignment. In the quotation below, Badu, a 39-year-old man who has an uncle abroad, explains why he sometimes calls his uncle on video:

The video call is when you want evidence. Some may ask you to take a picture or do a video on the building under construction to see the stage of the project. Let's say you're doing something for someone abroad; at times, you want to prove yourself that what you're saying is correct, and so you take the video to show the person so the person can be rest assured nothing is amiss (Badu, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

In the quotation above, Badu states that the demand for the proof could either be initiated by the non-migrant relation or at the request of the migrant relation abroad. I have discussed thoroughly in Chapter Five that the use of various forms of surveillance is driven by the wanton misappropriation of resources sent by migrants to relations back home for various purposes, including the construction of residential properties. These actions are undergirded by the tensions that sometimes characterise the trusteeship obligations.

In sum, relations with non-affective bonds also demonstrate preferences for different types of mediums of interactions made available by current communication technologies. However, these preferences are shaped by the social practice of trusteeship care obligations, which create appreciable emotional distance even though they necessitate multiple levels of interactions. The emotional distance among the relations with non-affective bonds shapes how communication technologies are used in the interactional processes. There is a greater preference for voice-based mediums among those with affective bonds due to the immediacy effect. However, unlike relations with affective bonds, the preference for voice-based mediums is further premised by the limited interactional space, the culture of oratory and the high prevalence of illiteracy. Despite the high prevalence of illiteracy, literate members of the families, to a limited extent, also use text-based mediums such 'WhatsApp chats' to arrange for a more convenient time to interact given the varied time zones and schedules. This usage of the text-based medium falls in line with that of relations with affective bonds.

Further, emails as a text-based medium are used but seldomly to send confidential documents. Participants believe in the medium's security and find it amenable to sending more significant volumes of text. Finally, the synchronous video-based medium verifies transactions; this pattern differs from relations with an affective bond. The social constructions of usage combined with the technological determinants give varying preferences for the various mediums. I highlight a quote from McLuhan (1994/1964, p. 90) below to shed light on the influence of technology in the processes and outcomes of transnational family interactions.

...we are concerned with all forms of transport of goods and information, both as metaphor and exchange. Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message. The use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ratios among our senses.

Although each technological media represents a material created by social agents and subject to exploitation, it integrates into the socio-cultural milieu and transforms it (Postman, 1992). These transformations have brought about diversity in how care is provided in the transnational space. Consequently, the transformations have created a low-end techno-bond 'relevant social group' whose ICT usage is constructed by their activity-centred interactions summed as various kinds of trusteeship obligations (Bijker & Pinch, 1987).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

Transnational families construct their usage of communication technologies through their care practices – emotional care, trusteeship obligations, and material care. The care practices of relations with affective bonds performed with contemporary communication technologies produce a 'high-end techno-bond' which privilege voice-based mediums due to the immediacy effect and the engendered closeness. A marked feature of interactions among 'high-end techno bond' users

is its heightened nature, which is made effective by cheap internet-based phone calls and asynchronous mediums such as chats, short messaging services and voice notes. These mediums are used to stretch the interactions throughout the day among relations as they share minute by minute details of their lives. The vibrancy of the interactions is given a further boost when video calls are introduced when the macro-level infrastructural provisioning enables it. Through the usage of video calls, these transnational families can encounter the virtual presence of their families abroad and their physical environment to the extent that it increases their emotional arousal and, consequently, deepens their concern for each other. High-end techno-bond can exist between any categories of kin as emotional attachments are established through pre-existing relationships before one's migration project and the transformations those relationships may go through overtime. Also, one's legal status is essential to some extent in the generation of the high-end techno-bond. Generally, the desire for emotional support increases during periods of crisis such as divorce, illness, or unemployment. Irregular migrants, due to their high propensity to crisis given their precariousness (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Tanle, 2012), interact more often with their relations back home for emotional and other forms of support (Mazzucato, 2009).

On the other hand, when care is performed through trusteeship obligations over contemporary communication technologies, it produces a 'low-end techno-bond' as the nature of the interaction is usually thin and focused on a third party or a transaction. The most preferred medium here is also voice call, given the immediacy effect. Other socio-cultural determinants such as the social context of the information, the culturally-embedded preference for oral communication, and the high prevalence of illiteracy add more weight to the preference for voice calls. The 'low-end techno-bond' users, much like the 'high-end techno-bond' users, also use text-based mediums to arrange for a more convenient time to make voice calls. However, they demonstrate an additional

preference for text-based mediums such as emails when larger volumes of text are exchanged, and more secure mediums are desired. Their usage of video calls is also to provide proofs of transactions in their bid to minimise abuse of trust.

Interactions that produce the ‘low-end techno-bond’ can also exist between any particular group of kin. However, since these relationships are activity-centred, performing the required activity is essential in determining how the relationships are formed. Fundamentally, one’s legal status is not tied to the formation of the low-end techno-bond. This conclusion is because both regular and irregular migrants constantly rely on their relations back home for various kinds of support services, a phenomenon which Mazzucato (2009) terms as ‘reverse remittance’.

Further, the scope of activities that generate the ‘low-end techno-bond’ is broad and may evolve throughout one’s migration project. For example, as Mazzucato (2009) highlights, early phase migrants rely primarily on their relations abroad as they deal with settling down in their new destinations. Also, migrants who leave younger children in the custody of other relations keep close interactions with those relations irrespective of the phase of their migration project (Dankyi, 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2015). Further, as migrants accumulate resources abroad, they invest in residential properties (Pellow, 2003; Smith & Mazzucato, 2009) and other income-generating businesses, all of which become occasions for sustained interactions with their relations back home.

The provisioning of emotional care and trusteeship obligations is primarily enabled by material care that manifests in the exchange of various kinds of remittances in the transnational space. Although not an ICT medium, human couriers play a vital role in the exchange of material care. As communication technologies were limited in the older technological epoch, information

regarding material goods sent through a courier was selectively directed to a focal person through a telephone call. Presently, however, when human couriers are used, a continuous flow of voice, video and text-based information is shared among the sender, the courier and the various nodes of receivers. These technologies have transformed how human couriers currently operate in the transnational space. One of the key transformations is the minimisation of trust and mutual obligation as the basis for the service.

Further, one's position in the transnational space, whether as a migrant or non-migrant, determines which technologies are used to transfer cash and non-cash remittances. Migrants, given their migration, gain access to more resources that put them in a position to influence several outcomes in their families. Thus, they most often decide on which formal or informal channels to use when sending remittances. Furthermore, once abroad, the legal status of the migrants also influences their decision on which of the available formal and informal channels to use. Irregular migrants are more likely to use informal channels such as human couriers and 'swap mobile money' due to their fear of arrest and deportation. In contrast, their regular counterparts have both channels open to their use without any restraint.

Baldassar et al. (2007), in their study of the transnational interactions among emigrants in Australia and their families in Italy, Singapore, Netherlands, Afghanistan and Ireland, found similar to this study that interactions on voice mediums remain primary and text-based mediums are used to arrange for a convenient time to make voice calls. They also found that newer communication technologies do not supplant older ones, but 'different tools are used for different purposes in different historical moments' (p. 118). For example, technological advancement has now made the phone call a commonplace occurrence. In contrast, writing letters or cassette recordings, which were commonplace in the older technological epochs, is now a special occasion practice. Even

though the findings in this chapter also reveal a similar tendency, the specific mediums that are preserved and transformed are context-specific. Here, study participants did not report writing letters, cassette recordings or postcards for their relations abroad, but instead, they reported transformations in how human couriers are used. A reason for the reported absence of letters and other mediums transmitted through the postal system is that post addresses in Ghana are not widespread, especially for private purposes and the limited popularity of writing culture in Ghana (Assimeng, 1997). Finally, even though transnational families construct their usage of communication technologies in producing both the ‘high-end techno-bonds’ and the ‘low-end techno-bonds’, these bonds are also shaped by the multimodal offerings of contemporary communication technologies in ways that transcend the agency of any particular social actor.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS IN TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTIONS IN AN EVOLVING ICT LANDSCAPE

#### 5.1 Introduction

The technologies for staying connected with relations abroad have evolved tremendously over the years, leading to transformations in the interactional experiences among transnational families. The evolution has been from static text-based letters and audio messages recorded on cassettes and delivered via snail-paced postal systems to expensive telephone calls on fixed phone lines (Castells et al., 2007; Mahler, 2001). Presently, there are many communication mediums and network services offered at a relatively cheap cost. The cheap cost is enabled by technologies such as Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol (VOIP) and the traditional Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN). These developments have changed the landscape of social interaction among transnational families, particularly considering the constraints of the past. Mama Regina, a 65-year-old woman in Ghana, highlights how the limited availability of communication technologies influenced how the news about her mother's death was relayed to her while in London in the 1980s:

When our mother died in the 1980s, I was in London at the time with my elder brother. Our relative in Accra sent us a telegram through my elder brother. I think he said he received a call from the post office that he had received a telegram, so they read the message to him. I think my brother, the one who works at the bank in Accra, was the one who sent the telegram. He wrote that 'Mother died Monday evening', and according to my elder brother, he received the telegram about 3:00 pm the next day. We were not informed about other salient details of the death, so we had to wait until the next day (Wednesday) to place a telephone call back to Ghana for further details about the sad news. In the meantime, we were in shock and couldn't still believe the news was trustworthy, even though we were convinced it was due to the source, as we had had news from home a week ago that mother was in good health. (Mama Regina, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

In the past decades, social interactions among transnational families were characterised by delays in feedback and exorbitant prices, which influenced the depth of information shared. In the vignette above, Mama Regina's elder brother had to wait until the next day to call his brother in Ghana, mainly because the call would be made from the fixed telephone line available only at his brother's office in Ghana. Thus, communication between transnational families was sparse.

This sparsity contrasts sharply with contemporary social interactions. The sheer number of communication media currently available when one wants to interact with a relation abroad becomes one of the testaments to the relative ease of transnational interactions. May, a 45-year-old participant from Ghana who frequently interacts with her husband in the United States, emphasises the preceding with the quotation below:

He likes trying new things. And you know the things keep on coming as and when. So, oh, now we can talk on messenger. Oh, now we can do video calls on messenger. 'Let me try calling you if it will go through. He calls, it comes through and then we stick to it. (May, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The modern tools for staying in touch enable families geographically dispersed across national borders to bridge the distance in meaningful ways with the hybridity of media forms that make their interactions livelier. Vertovec (2004) emphasises that the innovations in the tools for communicating have provided a more vital binding force in transnational social interactions. While the innovations introduce some form of relative ease compared to previously existing ones, they also come along with other newer challenges that shape how individuals appropriate their usages. John, a 32-year-old man in Ghana who interacts with his brother in the Arabian Gulf, highlights this double-edged effect in the quotation below:

I use WhatsApp because I think it is the cheapest means to communicate from Ghana. When you call through the traditional telecommunications networks, you may pay about GHS 10.00 per minute, so I find the WhatsApp calls relatively cheap. I can buy internet

bundles for the WhatsApp call at, say, GHS 2 or GHS 1, and with that, I can talk for about an hour or two, and the internet bundle would still not be exhausted. Our interactions would have been a real challenge if there were no WhatsApp calls as the traditional telecommunication companies charge more than WhatsApp. Sometimes, when I call him on WhatsApp, I inform him that the prolonged conversation has made me tired, so I must go and sleep. He also feels that we should talk for more than one hour, as he is far away from the family, so he should engage the family more (John, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

Even though John relishes the reduced cost of staying connected with his brother, this has led to prolonged conversations that sometimes make him physically exhausted. However, the challenge of physical exhaustion is not a collective experience - as John's negative appreciation differs from his brother's, who believes that the prolonged calls make him feel at home in a foreign land, thus establishing the basis for tensions. In the older technological epoch, tensions and conflicts in transnational interactions were typically related to the particular medium of interactions and the generally limited availability of the technologies. While in contemporary times, the tensions and conflicts usually relate to the different user experiences with the technologies and the message being communicated.

Given this background, this chapter highlights peculiar tensions and conflicts transnational families encounter as they relate with each other in different technological epochs. Apart from the chronological emphasis, the chapter also underscores how the kinship bond and the legal status of migrants intersect with the technological interface to engender different kinds of tensions and conflicts. Despite the focus of the chapter, it is essential to highlight that the manifestations of tensions and conflicts are intertwined with positive experiences of using communication technologies. Thus, in spite of the tensions, users also demonstrate positive tendencies such as the thrill of hearing from a relation abroad. They also delight in the reduction in the cost of using contemporary communication technologies and the ability to connect with relations through different mediums - voice, video, and text.

## **5.2 Older Technological Era – Sparsity of Interactions**

In the past (from the 1980s), available means of staying connected with relations abroad from the perspective of study participants were minimal. They included letters and audio cassette recordings, telephone calls made through public payphone booths, communication centres, and personal fixed phones owned by the individual or their neighbour. The depth of interactions among transnational families was very sparse due to the limited availability of telephones, the structural rigidities of the then Ghana Post and Telecommunications' services, illiteracy and the pervasive oral communication culture. This sparsity of interactions in no way expresses a lack of desire to stay in touch. Instead, it brings our attention to the enormity of structural constraints in limiting the desire. The subsequent sub-sections pay attention to these means of interaction by throwing more light on the various ways they constrained interactions among transnational families.

### **5.2.1 Letters and Cassette Recordings**

Information exchanged through letters or recorded audio messages were sent through the postal system, with locally-based post offices playing a central role. Writing letters at the time made the interactions asynchronous with delayed response time. Mama Nina, a 65-year in Ghana whose husband migrated to Europe in the 1980s, highlighted some of the frustrations she had to go through as she communicated with him.

At that time, we used to write letters; that was in 1985. So, communication was a very difficult task. When I write to him, it takes about two weeks for him to receive my letter and then he would also reply to my letter upon receipt. In all, it takes about five weeks for us to exchange letters from each other. (Mama Nina, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

In addition to the embedded constraints of writing letters at the time, the institutional delivery system added further strain. An essential strain highlighted by the respondents has to do with the

mistrust of the postal system, given some reported lapses. These lapses, as stated by the participants, included meddling with people's private mails, inadequate sorting and processing mechanisms, and delays apparently from the pooling and delivery systems in place at the time.

Mama Nina emphasises the previous below:

Sending letters and parcels through the postal system in Ghana was not an easy thing. During the transmission process, the letters could get missing. Sometimes, the officials who come across the letters could open it up to meddle with the content. The cassette recordings could also get lost in the post; anything could happen. (Mama Nina, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019)

Uncle Agyenim, another study participant who migrated to Europe in 1978 and currently resides there, also emphasised how the poor sorting mechanism of the then Ghana Post and Telecommunications Company (GP&T) hampered his desire to communicate with his family in Ghana below:

One of the challenges I had with writing letters was that the sorting staff at GP&T sometimes assumed Austria to be Australia and posted a number of the letters correctly addressed to me to Australia. I would sometimes call home from the Post Office here in Austria and ask my family back in Ghana that they informed me that they would write me on this or that day, but I am yet to receive any letter from them. They would then respond that they posted the letter about three months back and expected me to have received it by then. Thus, I had to wait for an extended period for the letter to be redirected to my correct Austrian address from the Australian Post. At other times, they [Australian Post office] would return the letter to the sender after their inability to trace the recipient address in Australia. (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

Thus, macro-level structures essentially mediate human social encounters in ways that significantly constrain the interests of actors. Transnational social interactions invariably encounter these structural constraints in more vivid ways than spatially-bounded families who may exchange communication over the dinner table or as they go about their daily activities at home. This manifestation brings to the fore the layered levels of inequality embedded in the transnational interactional space, which other scholars have highlighted (Castells et al., 2007; Levitt, 2001b).

Thus, even though transnational families share the same social interactional space, this space is spatially differentiated with country-specific development outcomes that influence the availability and ease of the technologies for interactions.

Further, illiteracy inhibited the ability one had to write letters. When people cannot write, a literate person is usually contacted who writes the letter as the sender dictates the message in a local dialect. Mama Akua, a 67-year-old woman in Ghana whose siblings and some extended relations went abroad in the 1980s, emphasised that ‘I never really had any good formal education, so I cannot read and write. Thus I relied on other persons to assist me anytime I needed to communicate with my relations abroad’ (Mama Akua, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019). In such circumstances, the privacy of the message becomes compromised.

Furthermore, the sender is also not certain about the accuracy of the message written or read. Highlighting the strain of transmission losses, additions and misinterpretations, Cudjoe, who has lived in Europe since the late 1980s, emphasised that ‘why will I write the letter for the reader to take some of my words out’ (Cudjoe, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019). By highlighting that the reader would take some of his words out, Cudjoe brings to the fore the tendency for the message sent to be diluted based on the reader’s judgement and competency. As Cudjoe indirectly points out, illiteracy rates are low among emigrants than with their non-migrant relations in Ghana. Cudjoe’s emphasis on the disparities in literacy rates is corroborated with statistics from the 2019 World Development Report, where Ghana’s expected years of schooling is 11.5 years, with mean years of school of 7.2 years. The wider variation between the expected and average years of schooling in Ghana contrasts with that of the United States, which has 16.3 years as against 13.4 years, Germany has 17.1 years as against 14.1 years, and Austria has 16.3 years as against 12.6 years (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

In addition to the lower literacy levels in Ghana compared to the countries of emigrant relations, there are further regional disparities between rural and urban areas in Ghana. Thus, among the two field sites in Ghana, study participants in Nkoranza who interacted with their relations abroad in the 1980s and early 1990s were seven (7); out of which, four (4) indicated they could not read or write. This rate contrasts with one (1) out of the eight (8) participants in Accra in the same category. Thus, urban residents are more likely to be educated and able to communicate in writing with their relations abroad than their rural counterparts, giving them the leverage to minimise the strain illiteracy poses for transnational communication at the time. The urban bias in literacy rates is underscored by the high prevalence of opportunities for formal education and formal employment in urban centres and the increased usage of English in both formal and informal circles in Accra (GSS, 2019).

Given the illiteracy constraints in writing letters, participants who reported literacy barriers often resorted to audio cassette recordings. What was, however, puzzling about the mode of couriering the cassette was that more often than not, participants bypassed the post office and used human couriers. Several reasons account for the puzzle. First, given the structural constraints of the then state monopoly GP&T, in sending and delivering letters and parcels, it becomes imperative for social actors dealing with the structure to bypass it and develop an alternative to complement and make up for its failings (Merton, 1938). Additionally, a number of the participants, particularly those in rural areas, did not have personal post office addresses that could facilitate the required service. Mama Eunice, a 67-year-old participant in Ghana who interacted with her husband abroad in the 1980s, illustrates the preference for human couriers below:

In those days, there were no phones, so we used to use cassettes. He speaks and records on the cassette, and when he finds someone who's coming to Ghana, he sends it to us through

that person, and we will play and listen and all that, then we will also record on the cassette and give it to the person to be taken back to him. (Mama Eunice, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020).

Even though the use of human couriers dealt with some of the institutional drawbacks of the postal system at the time, it also had its strains. The most striking is the sporadic nature of the availability of the couriers, which meant they could never be relied upon when a steady flow of communication is desired. Participants who lived in Accra had greater leverage, again on human couriers than those in Nkoranza. Mama Nina emphasises the point below:

You know that the Ghanaian community in London is quite large, so occasionally, I used to get someone travelling from Accra to London, and I would send a cassette recording through that person. (Mama Nina, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

Accra serves as a transit zone for all international air travel. Additionally, being urban and cosmopolitan, many Ghanaian diasporas have homes in Accra compared to Nkoranza and other localities (Owusu, 2008). Thus, one was more likely to encounter a known person travelling from Accra to the desired destination abroad and willing to serve as a courier

### ***5.2.2 Fixed Lines – Payphones, Personal Telephones and Communication Centres***

In addition to the writing of letters, there were fixed telephones, accessed either through a public payphone booth, a communication centre, self-ownership, or a neighbour's own. The penetration of fixed phone lines in Ghana, much like other African countries, was shallow, with a high concentration in the cities and major towns, making the level in Accra higher than that of Nkoranza. Overall, four (4) out of the eight (8) participants interviewed in Accra indicated that they had fixed phone lines at some point as they related with their relations abroad. At the same time, none of the seven (7) respondents in Nkoranza ever owned a fixed phone line.

Further, personal ownership of fixed telephone lines in Ghana in the 1980s and for the most part for its period of ascendancy was mainly in the domain of the elites given the exorbitant charges.

May, a participant of the study, emphasises the previous below:

We used to live in a compound house in a suburb in Accra. We didn't have telephones at home then, but our next-door neighbours did. I will say they were very wealthy, and so they had a landline. So, every Sunday, we received calls from abroad on their landline. When a call comes through for us, they receive it and tell the caller to hold on. Then they come home to call us. Sometimes, they will talk to the caller and send somebody to call us, or the person will call and say, "oh, tell them I will call again in the next 30 minutes". So, we go there and wait for the person to call again. So basically, we were recipients of the calls from abroad (May, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

As some persons did not own fixed telephone lines at home at the time, the neighbour's telephone and/or the communication centre, more popular with rural residents, were used to receive calls placed by relations abroad. Migrant relations, therefore, bear the cost of the calls most of the time. The imbalance in the cost burden was institutionalised by telecommunication service providers with the then 'collect call'. The 'collect call' service enabled the receiver rather than the caller to pay for the cost of a call. However, during the fieldwork, none of the participants highlighted that their relations abroad were called on the 'collect call' service. This may be because the participants mostly were not owners of the landlines and were, in most cases, receivers of calls placed by their migrant relations.

Further, in the advent of communication centres, it was not in the operators' interest to allow their customers to use the 'collect call' service. Also, payphones were not configured to make 'collect calls'. Given this trend, participants abroad often mentioned the financial strain the frequent calls to their relations in Ghana placed on them. Cudjoe emphasises that:

At the time, it was costly calling from abroad, but because we were not hearing from them, we had to call. You know, sometimes you'll call the communication centre, and you will have to hold on for them to go and call your people so that you can talk. The meter will be running for all that period (Cudjoe, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019).

Given the flow of communication then, characterised mostly by calls from abroad to relations back home, relations abroad out of necessity prioritised whom to call and how often the calls could be made. This selective interaction undoubtedly, brought about social distancing between the migrant and their relations back home. The distance, often, were not well-appreciated by relations at home who begrudged the migrants and accused them when they visit. Uncle Agyenim, a participant of the study resident in Austria, emphasises the preceding:

Calling home at the time was very expensive and one, therefore, had to balance the need to relate with family back home with the cost. Thus, my sisters felt I forget about them when I am abroad, and there were times when I returned to Ghana; my sisters would complain to my father that they hardly heard from me when I was in Austria. In such instances, I would usually reply to my father that they also never called me! (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

When people in Ghana had to call relations abroad, they either used the payphone or went to a communication centre, even though this was a rare practice given the exorbitant cost. Also, the usage of the payphones had further challenges with their limited number and the high patronage. Maame Esi, a 67-year-old woman who lives in Ghana but interacted with her husband in the UK, highlighted some of the challenges she encountered below:

I also occasionally went to the phone booth at the post office when I wanted to talk to him. However, when you use a phone booth to communicate, you could not prolong your conversations given the sheer number of people waiting to take their turn. So, one had to cut short whatever ongoing conversations to make room for others. (Mama Esi, 9<sup>th</sup> April 2019)

The excess demand for telecommunication services, given the limited supply, led to the creation of communication centres in the late 1990s in Ghana. Further, the emergence of the centres was linked to entrepreneurial innovations to deal with structural constraints. These centres were also over-concentrated in the cities where the demand for the service was relatively higher. However, unlike the payphones and the fixed telephone lines, which were rarely available in rural areas like

Nkoranza, some rural settlements had one or two communication centres as the business model became more viable in subsequent years. Haggarty et al. (2003) report that the communication centres' service cost was ten times higher than that of the state-owned GP&T. However, the popularity of communication centres was primarily premised on the savings relations in the homeland made through their usage. Relations in the homeland, more often than not, were recipients of calls by their relations abroad. Unlike receiving calls at the neighbour's house, which was mostly limited to city dwellers and those who had rich neighbours, communication centres provided a more accessible opportunity for a more significant portion of transnational families, especially families in rural settings.

### ***5.2.3 A Peek into a Communication Centre – Account from a Former Manager***

We started operations in the year 2000. We had three telephone lines and three booths. The booth was where people stood to make or receive their calls. It was similar to the telephone booths provided by GP&T. Three people could make calls simultaneously. Aside from those three lines, we also had a fax machine. It was connected to one of the three lines. This meant that it could be used for fax services and also phone calls. People came to send letters via fax machines. We also had a photocopier. Later we added computers to type people's letters. Our centre was very big. There were two other communication centres before we started operating, but they had only one line each. We had three and so people liked our centre. They knew they wouldn't have to wait for a long time before making their calls because there were extra lines. It took a long time to make calls at the other centres because they had only one line. Customers would have to wait in a long queue before getting the opportunity to make their calls. Although the community was wired with the fibre optic infrastructure for the fixed phone lines, only formal institutions like the rural bank and the hospital and commercial entities like us subscribed to the fixed telephone service. They were expensive at the time.

We billed customers based on the time spent on the call. Therefore, immediately after the customer picks the call, we pressed a timer to read the number of minutes spent on the call. Oh, there were lots of contestations on bills raised for customers. Some complained that we pressed the timer before they started making their calls. The billing structure was that the first three minutes was at a separate fee. The rest of the minutes spent were billed per second. Given this, some would arrange with us to spend only three minutes and thus pay only the fixed amount. However, some don't hang up after three minutes. They spend a few seconds after the three minutes. Per our structure, those seconds eat into the next

minute, so they ought to pay extra, but some don't see why they ought to pay for those few seconds after the three minutes. Thus, there were quarrels now and then, but we made sure every bill was settled no matter the time-lapse.

We knew most of the customers, so we received calls from people who requested to speak to their relatives here in Nkoranza. We had a messenger who usually went on errands on a bicycle. So, what we did was we'd tell the caller on the other side to call back later and then our messenger would go and inform their relatives and sometimes come with them on the bicycle. We had many customers on any given day, an estimate of about ten persons during the weekdays. The weekends were our peak season. The peak seasons maybe because that's when the migrants were free. Thus, the numbers on weekends were uncountable. And this involved those placing and receiving calls. We had many customers.

Some callers could not describe the person they wanted to talk with adequately, so we couldn't identify their recipients in such circumstances. Sometimes, some of the customers here in Nkoranza came for our numbers to be given to their relatives elsewhere. Usually, when they did that, they'll tell us where they live so that when their relatives call, we would know where they live. We also devised a method to invite those who lived in the remote villages to fill a form. We took their details so that we know who and where to find them when their relatives called. Because they lived in the villages, we usually passed the messages through the commercial vehicle drivers who plied those routes.

We also received remittances on behalf of the relations of some migrants. Some had mothers in the villages who were not literates. Therefore, the migrants usually involved us in the process. They sent whatever they had to send to us. We, in turn, withdrew the monies and called their relatives to come here for it. We called their relatives to come here, and so there was no way we could cheat them. We were also an established centre with a permanent office, and so they had to trust us. There was no way we would squander their monies because that would've been the end of our business. Thus, we had their trust.

Sometimes, when the migrants visit home, they look out for us to thank us with gifts such as CD players and watches. We had a relationship with a number of the migrants who called our centre frequently. Sometimes, they call just to talk to us and not their relations. They usually had so much information about Ghana. Therefore, they called to usually get the specifics from home. There were times some would call and, for instance, inquire, "Hey, I've heard that so and so has happened. What's the truth in it?", then we gave them explanations as to whether what they heard was true or false.

After five years in business, mobile phones became common in the system, so the communication centres were no longer popular. The centre is now an internet café and also offers secretarial services. **(Interview with a former manager of an erstwhile communication centre at Nkoranza, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019)**

The narrative above provides a peek into the operations of a typical communication centre. Among the disruptive experiences people had from using these centres, such as loss of privacy and long

queues, contestations on the billing systems were the most common. The contestations affirm the fact that the cost of telecommunications services was exorbitant at the communication centres. Further, centres with only one fixed telephone line also attracted many long queues resulting in unproductive delays. Maame Adiyaa, a 60-year-old, who used the communication centre to interact with her relations abroad, commented on some of the constraints below:

Any time my siblings called from abroad, the personnel from the communication centre would come to my house to inform me about the call, and I would have to leave whatever I was doing at the time to receive the call. Sometimes, one would meet long queues and wait for some time before it gets to your turn. (Maame Adiyaa, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2019)

Additionally, recipients of calls at those centres who lived in remote villages had added strain, given the chain for relaying the information to them and the distance they had to travel. The centre manager, in his interview, also highlights that in some circumstances, relations abroad are not able to adequately describe whom they wanted to speak with and where they lived, resulting in the inability of the centre to arrange for them to receive the call. Further, from the account, frequent callers from abroad to the centre had a good working relationship with the manager. The good relationship sometimes resulted in resources exchange – confirmed information about happenings at home flowed from the centre manager to the callers, and the callers abroad presented gifts to the centre manager during their visits home. This practice seems innocuous and underscores the normative principle of reciprocity embedded in social relationships, especially between families and friends (Kleist, 2017; Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Mazzucato, 2009; Nukunya, 2016; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012). However, it increases the dependency burdens of migrants while also providing avenues for gossips. Some of such forms of gossips are part of community surveillance. Further emphasis is given to community surveillance reports in subsequent discussions in this chapter.

Study participants also identified further disruptive tendencies in their use of communication centres in their interactions with relations abroad. Blessed, in her early 30s from Accra, highlighted some of the challenges as she communicated with her father in the USA in the early 2000s:

Sometimes when you are talking, and people around are trying to interpret, they want to bring their mouth into the conversation. They are sitting around, and it is like some of them too... I was even telling somebody recently that it seems some people like to sit at the communication centre all the time. They know people's issues, so when you are on the phone, they kind of know what you are talking about with your relations. Because they don't have anything to do, they sit all the time as the friends of the centre's operators. They are harmless people, but the thing is that when people meet, they will talk about other people, you know! So, that kind of thing too, and sometimes there are certain things that we need to talk about that require privacy, but the centre's environment does not provide that, so one couldn't have certain conversations at the centre (Blessed, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019).

Blessed's quote above emphasises challenges with privacy in using the communication centre to communicate with relations abroad. The privacy challenge was occasioned by the constant presence of people I refer to as settlers, who use the centre as a place to while away time and keep the company of their friends, who may be the manager or the messenger of the centre. As was highlighted in the quote, over time, these settlers become familiar with the flow of conversations of the centre's customers and would often provide unsolicited inputs. Given this constraint, Blessed indicates she was uncomfortable discussing personal and sensitive things with her father at the centre.

As can be assumed, the strain of the sparsity of interactions occasioned by the limited and expensive nature of postage and telecommunication services at the time would have been felt more by very closely-knitted transnational relations who desire to interact more frequently with each other. Further, conditions abroad differ based on the socio-economic and political environment of the destination region. Therefore, not all emigrants were able to interact with their families in the 1980s and early 1990s. Among the study participants, the relatives of irregular migrants – sixteen

out of the thirty-one participants from Nkoranza – who migrated to Libya, emphasised that they could hardly communicate with them while they were en route and at their early phases when they reached their destination. Thus, families of irregular migrants were exposed to more significant emotional angst from their inability to know the well-being of their migrant relations, given the communication gap. Cudjoe indicated that his migratory root was Ghana-Libya-Germany. While, he was in Libya, he highlighted his inability to communicate with his family and its consequences below:

The telephones system wasn't working in Libya at the time. Where will you make the calls? That's why I am saying it was difficult. It's not that there were any problems. Well, there were problems because they were harassing us. The police service used to harass us. We extended our regards to the family left behind through our fellow migrants who returned or visited home. The few times I was able to call home, my mother, for instance, beamed with joy as she expressed relief from too much worrying about me (Cudjoe, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019).

In a nutshell, during the old technological epoch, transnational families had limited interactions. The interactions were more limited among irregular migrants and their relations. This inability to stay in touch with relations abroad leads to uneasiness in the families. It also affirms that interacting with relations and knowing what is happening in their daily lives creates a sense of security (Baldassar, 2016). Additionally, it also highlights the central role communication plays in the life of transnational families (Vertovec, 2004). At the same time, it heightens our appreciation of the various layers of institutions and artefacts that mediate such interactions. Thus, any flow of communication in transnational families must be appreciated beyond individuals' desire and ability, to include institutional and technological affordance. The telecommunication infrastructure also created multiple layers of dependency among transnational families with relations abroad, shouldering a double burden of the cost of communication and the demand for material resources in the form of cash and non-cash remittances.

### **5.3 New Technological Epoch – Regular and Heightened Interactions**

In the older technological epoch, cost, illiteracy, and institutional rigidities limited how relations abroad connected with their homeland, leading to the sparsity of interactions. In contemporary times, however, technological innovations, liberalisation in the provision of telecommunication services and its attendant reduction in the cost of the services have led to intensified interactions. Given this, there is a greater propensity to call relations abroad and vice versa. The quote below from Ashiatu, a young woman in her early 30s in Accra, whose husband lives in the USA, emphasises the preceding:

Ooh, when you came, I was even on the phone with him. He calls me very often just to check up on me. When we were dating, he used to call me about six times a day. After our marriage, he calls me very often. Sometimes, when he calls me, I would have to excuse myself to sleep because of the stage of the pregnancy, I do not have the strength to stay up for longer hours. (Ashiatu, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2019)

Since the first mobile telecommunications network in Ghana in the year 1992, the sector has experienced an exponential growth which has been attributed to the leapfrogging of communication technologies given the low penetration rates of fixed phone lines (Asante, 2014; Castells et al., 2007; Haggarty et al., 2003). Due to internet services available on smartphones, people can stay in touch with their relations abroad. They do this through calls and text that are not placed on traditional mobile telecommunications systems but internet-enabled applications such as Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, Facetime, Imo, and Viber, at a further reduced cost in the form of internet bundles. Thus, communicating with relations now comes with several options at reduced prices leading to regular and intensified contacts among transnational relations.

In addition to the reduced cost, available technologies also allow for video calls that have heightened the sense of proximity. It has also opened avenues for monitoring with varying

consequences. Fred, a young man in his early 30s who lives in Accra with his wife in the USA, illustrated how video calls heighten the sense of proximity below:

You know, due to the technological advantage we have over previous eras, we can link up via video calls. Sometimes, for example, she would tell you that she has done this new hairstyle which I would like to see, because if she were here with me, naturally, I would have seen her. So, the best thing is to go in for a video call, so you try and video call, and you see her and admire that and all that. So, it's kind of make you feel like the person is right by you because you can feel what the person is doing, what the person is wearing, or how she is looking like, has she gotten something new. We could have a video call, and she would show me that she has just bought this thing, blah blah blah. Once she decided to rent a place, we had a video call where she showed me each room, so it is almost like you are walking her through the rooms seeing what she is trying to... So, I feel some of those things are best experienced if you were there, but once you are not there, you can still be part of her experiences when you interact through video calls. (Fred, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

Another study participant, Jane, a 31-year old wife whose husband is an immigrant in Italy, highlights how video calls allow her husband to monitor and sometimes control her activities of below:

The video calls are more than the times he does voice calls. This is because when he calls, he wants to know where exactly you are. They find it hard to believe us when they are there. When you're discussing something with them, they think you're lying to them. So, they do video calls. Even when the fan is making noise, they'll ask, "where are you? I can hear some funny noise in the background?" as if you are outside. So, they always want to know where you are. So even with the video calls, there are times he calls, and the room will be dark, and he'll ask why the room is dark. So, you'll have to put on the light. Initially, it was the voice call when we started, but after some time, he doesn't trust anyone. So, whether you like the video call or not, you'll do it. (Jane, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019)

Video calls, and the frequent and intensive interactions, have now promoted visibility in a more pronounced way, thereby allowing relations to monitor and sometimes control the activities of each other, leading to increases in the avenues for domination. These attributes of contemporary communication technologies promote surveillance and intensified avenues for transnational freeloading. In the subsequent sections, I shed light on these two forms of disruptions.

### **5.3.1 *Surveillance***

The ability to externally verify what relations report in their interactions affirms or dampens trust and promotes a dominant interest in the relationship. This external verification sometimes becomes vital in relationships as macro patterns of social interactions inform our understanding that social actors sometimes act in their interest, irrespective of the interest of the other. Further, social actors also hide detrimental information and present socially desirable fronts to sustain social relationships or promote other ends. Thus, when relations engage in surveillance, they affirm that, in some ways, they have been socialised to appreciate the macro patterns of interactions. Transnational surveillance also reveals culturally embedded layers of domination and subordination that is re-shaped by the transnational experience. These layers of domination and subordination find expression in the type of kinship bond that exists between relations. Thus, in the following sections, I focus on transnational surveillance practices of parents, spouses and extended relations to highlight how existing power dynamics among the kinship groups are reconstituted.

#### **5.3.1.1 *Parental Surveillance***

The primary interests of transnational parents that shape their surveillance practises are to ensure that their children remain rooted in the Ghanaian society at the macro level and maintain particular values the parents' generation cherishes, despite the transnational experience of their children. The interests of parents are articulated by the Ghanaian Ambassador to Norway in her interactions with the Ghana Union in Norway below:

A time will come that you cannot walk. I don't think you would like to end up in an old people's home here, some may, but if you will find the back of your palm sweet, it is not as sweet as the palm. In the future, you may like to go home, and your children, if you don't seep them into the Ghanaian culture, they would not know that it is their

responsibility to take care of you. You will be there during your retirement, and they would call to say 'Hi' and later hang up. As I sit here, I have a designated amount I send to my father each month, and each of my siblings does the same. It is our responsibility to teach them. That is our culture, isn't it? And we need to teach them whether they are in Norway or wherever. I think that this is an opportunity for us to seek our Ghanaian culture for our benefit (Greetings from Abroad Facebook Live Video on October 10 2019).

The desire to root children living abroad into the Ghanaian culture is deep-seated among parents, whether they are migrants with their children or their children are abroad while they remain in the homeland. The Ambassador quoted above sums up the desire as, 'if you will find the back of your palm sweet, it is not as sweet as your palm'. The quotation is a literal translation of a Ghanaian adage that means that the values and norms that one is used to in Ghana are preferable to those of the destination regions. Thus, study participants who have their children abroad, irrespective of their age, usually maintained regular contact with them through phone calls, social media such as Facebook and WhatsApp, and video calls. Yaa, a middle-aged mother who has all her three children (in their 20s) in the United States while she lives in Ghana with her partner, often resorts to monitoring through multi-modal platforms such as Facebook. She highlights her monitoring techniques below:

When my children migrated to the US initially, I was always looking out for their postings and photographs on Facebook to see the kinds of dresses they wear and the company they keep. I was constantly watching out for their profile updates. Anytime I saw photos of them that seemed unacceptable to me, I would quickly inbox them, download the photograph and later counsel them. When they call, I never cease to advise them based on our religious values. (Yaa, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019).

Even though Yaa is not physically present with her children, she uses their social media presence to assess their lives abroad. She picks preliminary information from her children's photographs and videos they share with their contacts on Facebook. She follows up with text-based messages and later calls to get further details from what she saw and counsels them. Thus, she engages in using multi-modal platforms in her distance parenting to ensure that her children who live abroad

do not depart widely from her expectations. These platforms tend to give an always present feel of remote others, which also heightens visibility and, subsequently, control. Madianou (2016), in her study of Filipino migrant mothers in the US, termed their tendency to have a constant and peripheral awareness of happenings in the lives of their children in the homeland as ‘ambient co-presence’. A term she uses to mirror the proximity of transnational families to physical co-presence, which is assumed as the gold standard in social interactions (Collins, 2004).

Other participants used covert means to monitor and control the lives of their children abroad. Some of these covert means include unrestrained availability of parents, frequent advice and routine checks on their friendship networks, happenings in their school and work environments. Mama Adwoa, a 65-year whose son is in the USA, emphasises her covert monitoring practices in the quotation below:

I long to talk to my son anytime, so I don't get bothered by his calls; I don't see it as an interference. Thus, I would always pick up his calls; the only time I may miss a call from them maybe when I don't hear the phone ring. So, anytime I hear the phone ring, I would pick the call. I have taken it to be that I don't go to work, and I don't have anywhere to go now, so anytime my son calls me, I would answer his calls, but I know when to call him given his schedules. Ooh, when we communicate, we talk about daily reports and others. I tell him that he should further his education. When you travel abroad and your educational level is low, you would do manual work. I also tell him to manage his funds well and that he should remember his roots and think of investment back home because he would not live abroad forever. So, by the time he returns, he would have had some ongoing investment projects to support his stay, to make his life here comfortable. So, we communicate a lot. He could also ask me, ‘ooh, Mum, how are you? What are the general prices of land in Ghana? What can we do to bring in some good returns?’ And yes, he has taken concrete steps to acquire a house here. This house where I live now is for him. (Mama Adwoa, Field Interview, 2019).

In the quotation above, Mama Adwoa emphasises that her constant availability is underlined by interests geared towards causing her son to maintain his Ghanaian roots through practices such as retiring to Ghana and building an investment portfolio. She also subtly advises her son to adhere

to her religious values, among others.

Additionally, as she indicated, Mama Adwoa's constant availability to interact with her son is due to her retirement and limited activity schedules. However, study participants whose children are abroad emphasised that they would not have consented to the migration of their younger, immature children. These parents were happy to fully support their mature children's migration as they believe their roots in Ghanaian society would be more profound than when they are younger and immature. In this way, the parents believe their level of cultural assimilation in their destination regions would not be total. Given this tendency, children's migration project occurs when parents are considerably older and nearing their retirement age. They have more time to interact with them and influence a number of their actions. Joe, a man in his late 50s whose 24-year old daughter lives in Canada with her husband, highlights some apprehensions of parents when their children migrate at an immature age below:

I would not be comfortable if my daughter migrated earlier. If the child lives in Ghana until he completes Secondary School before migrating, her level of integration in Ghana would be better. Thus, the socio-cultural environment abroad cannot influence her that much. When the child migrates abroad when she is not mature enough, she turns into one of them. Over there, Ghanaians turn very fast, assume she learns how to smoke, she over smokes more than the average person abroad (Joe, Interview 2019).

The preceding illustrates that the parents' monitoring and control of migrant children is played out in several ways, including delaying the age of migration. Here, the means of control is not communication technologies per se but the inculcation of the desired socio-cultural values, which parents reinforce through their transnational interactions with their children upon the latter's migration. Thus, the actions and dispositions of the children in the destination region become an agglomeration of their pervasive Ghanaian past, which serves as a frame of reference, mirroring the concept of habitus by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977).

Surveillance is also practised by parents when they migrate and leave their children behind. Even though some studies emphasise that children left behind are given adequate care by kin and non-kin (Cebotari et al., 2018; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Poeze et al., 2017), parents in their transnational interactions with their children demonstrate some apprehensions that shows that their children have too much leverage that must be curtailed. Blessed, in her early 30s, who lives in Ghana with her husband and children and has her father in the USA, emphasised below that during the period of her university education, her father's external validation of her actions was a nuisance to her:

Anyway, he could get in touch with me; he explored and used to reach me. He even got the contact of one of my friends when I was in University, my roommate, and my best friend; he had her contact. So, if he calls me and doesn't get through to me, he would just call her. So, he was just doing anything he could to get in touch me with. So, it was not strenuous for him to call me at all, but rather a bother to me to be receiving his calls all the time. He was calling every time, and every time he called, he had to speak to somebody around, and if I missed his call, he would ask 'what was I doing that I missed the call?' trouble for me. Seriously, he knew my schedule, at school, he knew my lecture schedule, he knew everything, he knew when he was supposed to call, but sometimes if he calls and I don't answer, he would question, 'what were you doing?' 'Who were you with?' (Blessed, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019).

Other participants also decried their parent's over-reliance on purported reports from undisclosed members of the community. The manifestations of such tensions are elaborated below by Kwadwo, a 20-year old JHS graduate who lives in Nkoranza with his father in Italy:

Someone called to inform him that I was a stubborn guy in Ghana, but he realized what he was told wasn't the truth when he returned. He was told I don't sleep on time and several others. (Kwadwo, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

Alpha, a 21-year-old third-year University student, further illustrates the pervasiveness of parental reliance on the reports of other members in the community in forming judgements about their children below:

One thing with our long-distance families is that the parents listen to other people more. Thus, people call them and tell them stuff. They may see you standing somewhere, but the

way they will call your mother to explain the incident when you get home, you would know that you're in trouble. (Alpha, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

A number of the children interviewed indicated that their parents abroad generally paid more attention to the community surveillance reports than their perspectives on the issue at hand. These reports most often cast the children in a terrible light in the eyes of their parents. When such situations arise, parents applied various degrees of punishment to their children. These could range from reducing or withholding some of the care privileges they extend to them like gifts on special occasions such as birthdays, Christmas, Easter or New Year; to using third parties to reach their children on the phone to ensure that the children are indeed at a socially desirable place at any time of the day. This is usually to the displeasure of those children, as emphasised by Alpha below:

when you do something wrong, your parents will reprimand you. All parents will do that. But when you see that your child is in a situation, being too strict, withholding their privilege and shouting at your child is not the best way to go. (Alpha, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

Several reasons account for the apprehension parents have on children left behind. First, fathers particularly are brushed with the so-called permissive cultures of their destination regions to their chagrin. They have therefore become too sensitive about their perceptions of its undesirable tendencies. Thus, one way to avert such occurrences in the life of their children is to monitor them closely, or else, they manifest some of such undesirable tendencies (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Manuh, 1999). Second, migrant children are usually doted on by their parents with cash and non-cash remittances that give them some leverage, such as more spending ability, above the average child in their communities (Horst, 2006; Parreñas, 2005). This exposes them to risks related to how well they manage their newfound privilege. Therefore, parents act to protect the children's interests, at least from the parents' perspectives. Finally, mothers, given their traditional roles as carers and nurturers of children, reconstitute mothering when they are not physically present with

them (Parreñas, 2005). This entails maintaining constant interactions with them, which is sometimes misconstrued as overly intrusive by their children.

### **5.3.1.2        *Surveillance by Couples***

Even though historically and anecdotally fraught, the exclusivity of sexual rights is an underlying factor that consequently shapes the surveillance of transnational couples. The tradition of polygyny is given legal assent in marriage under customary law. Thus, sexual exclusivity for couples is not a norm, particularly for men (Nukunya, 2016). Further, some couples live in unions where formal laws are not in place, as emphasised in Chapter Two. Therefore, one would have expected that the exclusivity of the sexual right would not be problematized among transnational couples as the avenues for sexual fulfilment are limited given the physical distance. In some cases, spouses grudgingly accept their incident. Auntie Veronica, a woman in her early 50s whose husband has been in Italy for 18 years without any visit to his wife and children in Ghana, highlights below some of the ways wives grudgingly accept infidelity due to migration:

I can't say that my husband has been faithful in terms of sexual exclusivity in this marriage. This is because his son called him one particular Father's Day, but a lady picked the phone. She told him she is also his wife. She was his former girlfriend who had migrated to Holland, and so I believe she visited him. Later, he called me to apologize, but I told him to forget about it. As a man, you cannot say he will stay faithful (Auntie Veronica, 9<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

When Auntie Veronica underscores her acquiescence to her husband's possible infidelity encountered due to the ability to call relations abroad at will, with the phrase, 'as a man...' she undoubtedly highlights the gendered expectations of (in)fidelity. Thus, even in monogamous marriages, men tend to have multiple partners, colloquially termed 'side chics'. The pervasiveness of this phenomenon is captured in the popular imagination of Ghanaians in several ways. For

example, it has resulted in creative productions like the 2018 movie directed by Peter Sedufia titled ‘Sidechic Gang’. In the movie, a group of three women, whose less lucrative ushering business, sinks in the mud as they spot an innovative business of spying and reporting on men who cheat on their partners, much to the men's angst. Extensive scholarly work buttresses the preceding discussion (see, for example, Coe, 2011; Darkwah & Adomako Ampofo, 2008; Karanja, 1994; Nukunya, 2016; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2007).

Transnational couples separated from their spouses for considerable periods sometimes feel compelled by social pressures and loneliness to infidelity. This is emphasised by Kwame, a male in his early 30s whose wife of three years lives in the USA below:

Everybody is laughing at you. They tease you, ‘Your wife is here, you are there, you are suffering, you are not getting sex, you are not making love, and you would burn’. People are trying to put all sorts of ideas into my head, such as ‘someone is hammering your wife, and you are here’. Ah, you know, boys! Your pastors are praying for you to be together because it is not suitable for a man to be alone, blah, blah, blah. So, being together, everyone expects you to be together. Let’s say you would even feel like having lunch with somebody, or you get home, and it is all empty. Because I live with my sisters, I don’t go home early, and so when I get home, they would all be asleep in their rooms, and you need someone to chat with. You end up making friends that you are not supposed to make, making friends with other ladies. I am a very jovial guy, and because of the work I do..., you end up making a lot of female friends. So, as I said earlier, you sometimes feel like you are not married, so you end up doing the jokes and all those things and later something would speak to you that ‘eei, you are married oo’. Sometimes too, people try to put you in compromising situations, like they want you to sleep with somebody. Yeah, they even go to the extent of renting a room for you in a hotel, just so that you could sleep with somebody (Kwame, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019).

Even though communication technologies provide avenues for fulfilling the sexual needs of couples in transnational unions, virtual or phone sex is not primarily accepted. Out of the twenty participants with partners abroad interviewed, only four of them indicated that they engage in the practice of virtual or phone sex. Participants cited various reasons for this pattern. One was lack of interest – fifteen out of the twenty, and others mentioned it does not satisfy their sexual needs

in a meaningful way – two out of the twenty. Adiku (2017) also emphasizes that phone sex, although used to fulfil the sexual needs of transnational couples, does not limit the potential to engage in sexual affairs with persons other than the spouse. Thus, given the social pressures pushing couples to seek the fulfilment of their sexual desires from other persons, the limited avenues for legitimate sexual expressions, and the predisposition to loneliness, the expectations for the exclusivity of sexual rights among couples becomes compromised and thus, the heightening of surveillance.

However, the tendency towards a greater preference for sexual exclusivity could be accounted for by transformations introduced by religious beliefs, mainly, Christianity, where marriage is conceived of as between a man and a woman and fidelity in marriage is promoted as a core virtue (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Reid, 1995). It is important to emphasise that of the study's sixty-one participants, fifty-nine mentioned that they are Christians. Based on the desire to ensure fidelity, Nat, a male in his early 40s whose wife and uncle live abroad, highlights some ways in which the lives of transnational couples could be fraught:

A family where the father is not around or the mother is not around, or children are living somewhere else always has issues. Somebody will fill that void. Whatever it is, there are times people need people to talk to and share time together. That is where some of these issues will come. Your spouse may be out with someone else. It may just be for a drink, but before you know, someone may take a picture and start telling you about what your wife is doing or what your husband is doing. So, I think these are some of the issues. But because things are so tight economically, I don't see why you should migrate and leave your family (Nat, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The frequency and ability of anonymous reporters to send information to partners abroad on the suspicious conduct of partners in the homeland are due to the ease of communication – reduced cost and availability of some media for communication. Horst (2006), in her study of Jamaican transnational families, also observed the disruptive tendencies of modern communication tools. In

her account, Lisa, a Jamaican who had her partner Robert in Germany, had her relationship brought to an abrupt end due to a report he received about Lisa's 'undesirable' conduct. In the end, Lisa's desire to reunite with her partner was dashed. More dramatically, Hannaford (2015), in her study of Senegalese transnational marriages, recounts how innovations in the technologies of communication stretch the social expectation that wives should ordinarily remain at home in a way that the study participants highlighted to be dehumanizing. The wives, in some cases, had to seek approval from their spouses on the appropriate attire to wear with the help of internet-based video communication technologies. They also have their movements in and out of the house monitored with fixed telephones at home, their mobile phones and the feedback from neighbours, who are often called upon to verify the whereabouts of the wives. Hannaford (ibid), therefore, concludes similarly to Horst (ibid) that innovations in technologies for transnational interactions do not always bring relations together but rather degenerate affective ties.

As ICT usage is socially adapted (Asante, 2014), it is crucial to understand context-specific complexities that shape its usage in the monitoring efforts of transnational couples. Among the Asantes of Ghana, for example, a model wife is the one who studiously works outside the home to cater to her children's needs. Unlike the Senegalese case, Wives in Ghana engage in economic activities outside the home to augment the family budget (Adomako Ampofo, 2007; Clark, 1999). A wife who does not work receives social opprobrium as lazy and a bad wife (Clark, 1999). Husbands, therefore, are not likely to decide that their wives should stop their economic activities and remain at home. All but one of the fifteen female partners interviewed have various formal and informal work engagements that take them outside the home. In addition to the socio-cultural predispositions of wives, fixed telephone lines, as has already been discussed, had a low penetration rate. With the advent of mobile phones, some existing subscribers ended their usage

of the fixed telephones (Haggarty et al., 2003). Thus, the home is not usually a suitable zone to focus monitoring efforts as wives work outside the home.

Transnational monitoring, therefore, takes a different form. However, much like what (Hannaford, 2015) describes, it has assumed a more active role in interactions due to the innovations in the technologies for communication. Here, reports, whether solicited or unsolicited from third parties to the union, particularly community members who know the couple, play an instrumental role. Sarpongmaa, in her early 30s, her husband in Italy but visits home yearly, highlights how a community member passed on an unsolicited report about her socially unapproved behaviour to her husband in Italy below:

I used to live in my former place. It was very far from town, and so he gave me money to buy a motorbike. As you know, one has to learn how to ride a motorbike to be able to use it and so I asked someone to teach me. I called to tell him about it. He knew all that. He said an unknown number from Ghana called him. He wasn't picking the calls initially, but when he later returned the calls, the person wasn't saying anything, but he heard a noise in the background. Later he called to tell me that the person called again and told him that it was about me. So, my husband got alarmed and asked what the problem was. The person said that I was seen riding a motorbike with someone in a park and that, as a newly married woman, I shouldn't be doing that. So, my husband said he told the person that he bought the motorbike for me and that as someone who didn't know how to ride, someone had to teach me how to ride. He said there was nothing wrong with riding the motorbike with another person in the park. He rebuked the person for wasting credits and accused the person of acting in ways that can ruin people's marriages. He also warned the person never to call him on such an issue again. Otherwise, he will tell me who he or she is and direct me to go and meet the person in his or her house (Sarpongmaa, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

The prevalence of community surveillance falls in tandem with the high community visibility of women as they go about their economic and nurturing responsibilities and underscores the surveillance's gendered nature. The desire for surveillance is premised on the collective interest to promote marital fidelity, which is also gendered, as already examined. Moreso, the gendered dynamics of transnational surveillance among couples indicate wives tolerance of husbands

infidelity, while husbands exercise considerable control of the actions and inactions of their wives who remain in the homeland (Hannaford, 2015; Mahler, 2001). Therefore, in addition to the reported community surveillance, one visible way the gendered dynamics of transnational surveillance manifested in the study is the migration pattern among couples. Even though migration is increasing feminised (Apatinga et al., 2020; Lam & Yeoh, 2018), married men generally tend to migrate than married women (Mahler, *ibid*). Out of the twenty (20) couples interviewed for the study, fourteen (14), representing seventy per cent (70%) of the couples sample, were wives as compared to six (6) and thirty per cent (30%) for husbands. The limited numbers of husbands in the sample were recruited with more tremendous efforts. Thus, when women remain at home, they are more exposed to the indigenous gendered dynamics than if they migrate (Manuh, 1999).

The flow of the community surveillance reports is not only from home to abroad but also from abroad to home. Kwaku Manu, a man in his early 50s whose wife is an immigrant in the USA, highlights that “.... someone I know in the US called to inform me that my wife has a child with another man over there even though she denied the allegation when I called to asked her” (Kwaku Manu, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019). However, as the community base of relations is always more extensive in the homeland than in the destination regions, mainly for first-generation migrants, who emigrated when they were of age, more reports flow from home to abroad than from abroad to home. Three out of the twenty couples indicated that they received reports about their partners from persons abroad, while ten pointed out that their reports were sent to their spouses abroad. Further, in closely-knit communities such as Nkoranza, community surveillance reporting is higher than in urban cosmopolitan regions such as Accra. However, of the thirteen persons who had either

been the subject or recipients of the reports, four are from Accra, indicating that it is not altogether absent.

Also, video calls provide more direct ways to monitor spouses without the involvement of other third parties. However, unlike the Senegalese case presented by Hannaford (2015), it is not often used for monitoring and generally for interactions. Some study participants highlighted that the frequent breaks in the call transmission due to poor internet infrastructure do not make it an often-used means of interaction. May, a 45-year-old woman in Accra who frequently interacts with her husband in the United States, highlights some of the challenges with video calls as follows: ‘we started using IMO for video calls, but you know the network here isn’t too good for certain things - the interruptions, the frequent cuts, and so, I enjoy the easier ones’ (May, 12<sup>th</sup> May 2019). The limited 4G infrastructure, particularly in areas with low population density like rural and peri-urban areas, constrain the interactional experiences of users of video call services (Karlsson & Cruz, 2018). Given this, among the study participants, those in Nkoranza especially, and those in peri-urban suburbs such as Amasaman, Ayikai Doblo, and Kwabenya used video calls sparingly. Also, other practical considerations such as the convenient time to place a call given differences in time zones do not make video calls preferable. Couples who live apart in countries separated by wide variations in time zones also struggle to get the necessary daylight needed to make video calls more visible. The struggle generally centres on demands on their time by legitimate and often non-negotiable activities such as their work and or school schedules and the need to interact with their partners amidst the fixed time difference. Ataa, a study participant whose husband lives in China, in a time zone that is eight hours ahead of Ghana, highlights below their limited use of video calls given the vast time difference:

We mostly call each other before he goes to work in the morning or after he closes from work. In the mornings, we do not talk for as long as I would also be at work. When he calls me in the evenings, the calls usually come when I am asleep at night, and I am generally able to respond, but with the darkness around, even when I switch the light no, it does not make it conducive for video calls. We, therefore, call each other on voice rather than video on WeChat (Ataa, 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019).

Community surveillance, therefore, becomes the active spousal monitoring technique reported by participants in the study even though, as has already been indicated, frequent voice calls and video calls also become an occasion for monitoring.

The surveillance outcomes are varied and are based on several factors relating to the strength of the relationship, the credibility of the reports after other forms of verification, and the ability of partners to seek mediation interventions. Relationships that generally have weak affective bonds are lucky to survive when reports of infidelity are received. Key informants during the fieldwork pointed to some women in the community that ‘they were once married to Migrant ‘A’ or Migrant ‘B’ and have had their marriages end due to uncovered infidelity on the part of the women’.

### **5.3.1.3      *Surveillance by Siblings and Other Extended Relations***

Interactions among siblings and extended relations are framed loosely by the principle of reciprocity (Kleist, 2017; Lévi-Strauss, 1969; Tsai & Dzorgbo, 2012). Here, communication is centred in most cases on the management of assets, providing extra oversight on the interest of the migrants such as care for children, spouses left behind and landed property. Boakye, a 42-year old male, highlights below how he takes care of his migrant brother’s interests back home in Ghana:

My brother in Libya, for instance, has a wife and children here. That means he has to take care of them. Every month, they have to hear from him. It’s either he’s sending them money monthly for the wife to take care of the children, or sometimes the wife may call him in need of something, so he will call me to stand in for him to meet the need requested by his

wife. It may be a funeral in the wife's family. Those are the kinds of things he may need me to stand in for him as if he were here physically (Boakye, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

Typically, where the interactions are successful, it leads to outcomes that are mutually beneficial to both parties. George, a 22-year-old, recounts the circumstances that led to his father's migration to Italy to emphasise successful reciprocal relationships:

He was a student in Ghana. He was an outstanding student. He had the opportunity to write an exam for a scholarship to study abroad. Luckily for him, out of the applicants from the whole of Ghana, he was chosen. Unfortunately, due to monetary issues, he couldn't go to Cuba to benefit from the scholarship. Because of what happened, he decided to do away with education in totality. So, he left Ghana for Cote d'Ivoire. That was where he met my mother, and they gave birth to me. Later my other siblings followed. After an extended stay as a migrant, he decided to come home. When he returned, his brother had migrated to Italy and had been successful, and so he asked my father not to go back to Cote d'Ivoire. His brother asked him to manage his properties here in Ghana on his behalf. Later, he decided to arrange for him to join him in a bid to show appreciation for the help my father had given him (George, Field Interview, 2019).

Conversely, in instances where the other relation maliciously abuses the implicit and explicit expectations for the interactions, it leads to the deterioration of the relationship. I emphasise the nature of the abuse to highlight that although relations may keenly be aware of the reciprocal system of exchange, their relative position of deprivation may not enable them to reciprocate the good deeds of others despite their good intentions (Kleist, 2017). Participants recounted instances where someone other than themselves maliciously abused the exchange principle while posing an 'everything is all right' front to their migrant relations. Uncle Agyenim, a 62-year old Ghanaian immigrant in Austria, emphasizes some instances where the reciprocal principle goes awry in transnational relationships below:

A friend of mine here, who is from Ghana, went for a loan, bought land and established a block factory with a block making machine and asked his nephew to oversee the commercial production of the blocks for him. Unbeknownst to him, this nephew sold the land, amassed the proceeds and rented the block making machine without any accountability to the true owner. Now, when he returns home to Ghana, he lives in a hotel with his wife. By this time, he could have built his own house. Well, for me, I have

managed to build a two-room house in Ghana, but such a situation of deceit is problematic. (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

The sentiment of abuse highlighted by Uncle Agyenim was shared as much by migrants as it was also by particularly their extended relations back home. Wisdom, a male participant who lives in Ghana and has a number of his extended relations abroad, highlights how his investment in building a good relationship with his brother-in-law was not reciprocated, at least in a way he desired.

Mostly when you have relations abroad that you interact with, you sometimes feel that it would also be a good idea for you to also visit them. At some time, I felt like travelling, and I bought the financial goodwill of my brother-in-law by reducing the cost of the services I rendered to him. I desired that he would reciprocate by inviting me to join him. However, I felt like he was not very responsive to my desire to travel, as I discussed with him. He would say that 'in-law, things are not good over here. This notwithstanding, he would call to inform me that he has sent some goods in a container to be sold here in Ghana. If he doesn't have money as he claimed, how does he get the support for all the initiatives? (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

The difficulty in this system of exchange is that the nature of the relationship is informal, recursive and non-linear. The informality makes it challenging to enforce implicit or explicit agreements. The recursion also highlights multifaceted dynamics that sustain the interactions and outcomes over time despite one's desire to end it. For example, relations abroad can capitalise on the invisibility of distance to influence how they interact with their relations in the homeland (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Coe, 2011). The non-linearity also means that the outcomes that are produced do not necessarily proceed from expectations but may involve several constellations, some of which may be mutually expected. The nature of the reciprocal exchange principle underscores the monitoring and surveillance actions in interactions among extended relations. A primary driver for the monitoring is to ensure that as much as possible, each party to the relationship can achieve a positive expectation, even when it is not the desired outcome.

Study participants emphasized some ways in which the monitoring and surveillance take place. This included community surveillance, sending external proofs of transactions such as receipts of payments through multi-modal platforms like WhatsApp, and providing video feeds of events to relations. Agyare, a 33-year old male in Ghana who oversees the building project of his uncle in Japan, emphasises how several external validating factors serve as a restraint on any intention of him to misapply the resources of his uncle below:

I have heard several instances where other people have misapplied the resources of their migrant relations. However, in my case, I have already made my relations aware that my uncle has been abroad for a long time. Thus, if he has decided to build a house and I take undue advantage of him, I would also be adversely affected in the end. Currently, my wife, children, and I, together with other extended relations, live in a house built by my uncle. I have therefore been very diligent as far as the building is concerned. Whatever comes to me from the remittances he sends to finance the building project are my due wages as a mason. I do not misapply what is meant for other people or activities. Also, some women live around the building site, and they report to him whatever progress we make on the building. Further, from the foundation stage to the roofing stage, whatever stage we get to, I send him videos and photographs on the building through WhatsApp. The building is an extension of where we currently live, so my uncle knows the environment personally. Thus, I cannot send him false videos and pictures. (Agyare, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

Agyare, quoted above, refers to some external checks that keep him in line to act according to his uncle's expectations as he oversees his interest in Ghana. Two of the checks are related to the use of communication technologies. The first, he emphasised, has to do with frequent reports his uncle receives from some women in the community. Although they may be acting to protect the uncle's interest, the women are also building bridges to sustain ongoing or future reciprocal exchanges. The surveillance reports have undoubtedly gained currency given the ease with which calls can be placed from Ghana to abroad and vice versa. These practices hardly took place in the old technological era, given the limited means and the cost of contact.

Nat, a male in his early 40s who lives in Ghana, narrates how he uses technology to validate actions taken on behalf of his uncle abroad.

So, when I say I show proofs, it means where receipts and those things are available, I will take shots of them, I will take pictures of stuff that are being done and send to him through WhatsApp. Also, as much as possible, if there are alternatives, if there are other people who can do it, once in a while, I will make them do it (Nat, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The quotations from Nat and Agyare demonstrate that in some instances, the initiative to use communication technologies to remain transparent and accountable begins with relations in the homeland. Therefore the practice demonstrates a deep-seated desire to maintain an appreciable level of unity and peace in the interaction, which undoubtedly has far-reaching merits for members of the extended family and the entire community. Several studies highlight that migrants are interested in promoting the development of their relations back home through initiatives such as support for chain migration schemes, investing in their education, buildings, and other community-level infrastructure (Darkwah et al., 2019; Levitt, 2001b, 2004; Mazzucato, 2009; Pellow, 2003).

### ***5.3.2 Transnational Freeloading***

Transnational freeloading is the tendency for transnational relations to free ride on each other, ostensibly driven by the norm of reciprocity, but particularly of unbalanced nature. As the pull-push basis for migration frames several migration projects, the underlying sentiment is that migrants are better off than their relations in the homeland (Adepoju, 2009; Anarfi & Ababio, 2018; Stark & Bloom, 1985). However, the sentiment might be far from reality as migration produces different outcomes, some of which undermines the economic privilege of migrants (Adiku, 2018). Uncle Agyenim, a 62-year old Ghanaian immigrant in Europe, emphasises the preceding discussion:

Mostly, the people back home think that if you are abroad, you are rich. However, the income we make here is for our daily subsistence, such as rent, transportation, food and utilities. We here are not better off, but as the musician, Ampadu says, “Life abroad is a

daily striving”. We struggle each day to make ends meet (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

Thus, relations abroad often become the host of the free-loaders in the parasitic interactions, fuelled by the relative ease of communication as the cost of calls has reduced significantly and the means available for contact have also become numerous. Migrants believe that some of their non-migrant relations elicit the culture of indirection (Elul, 2019) when in their attempt to freeload. Aba, a migrant mother in the USA in her early 40s, illustrates how the indirection plays out:

Our people back home are like that, when they call you, you can sense that it is because they need something from you, can you imagine, a friend or distant relations would call me to ask, ‘how are the children faring?’ or ‘how is your mother faring?’. Really! When my children and parents are in Ghana, if such people are concerned about them, they would rather ask for their numbers and call them directly. Such people later make all kinds of material requests from us, ranging from the latest iPhone, dresses in vogue and sometimes, even monies to pay for their rent. Life abroad is toilsome. I have to work several jobs to pay my utility bills, which add up to about USD 2,000.00 per month and to have savings to send home. Sometimes, the material things that our folks in Ghana ask for, we don’t even dream of owning one ourselves (Aba, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2019).

The relations of migrants in Ghana also raised the sentiment of freeloading calls. They also understood that their relations abroad, particularly some extended family members and married siblings, usually harbour the sentiment that any time they call, it is because they need some material benefits from them. This shared sentiment sometimes acts as a restraint that minimizes how relations in Ghana engage with some of their relations abroad. Abi, a 36-year in Ghana who has two of her married siblings abroad, underscores the fore-going discussions:

I don’t communicate with her. Her situation there is not all that good. Her husband took her to Italy, but due to their separation, she’s moved to Germany. At times the money to buy credits is difficult for her, and so we don’t communicate. I also don’t want to call her because usually, when you call her, she thinks you’re expecting something from her. So, I don’t call her. (Abi, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

Abi affirms the incidence of transnational freeloading calls from the quote above when she alludes to the fact that she does not call her sister because she knows her financial situation has

deteriorated. She also points out that relations abroad are pretty aware of the tendency of their families back home to make undue demands from them. Given this shared sentiment, not all contact actions result in an interaction. In other words, calling or texting a relation abroad does not mean there would be feedback. Migrants, therefore, strategically limit their contacts to a few relations to minimise the occurrence of transnational freeloading. At the same time, both close and distant relations of migrants in the homeland constantly reach out to them for various kinds of support given the perception that they are better-off (Tazanu, 2015). Thus, this avoidance and reaching out contradictions often cause disruptions in transnational relationships, a phenomenon that is emphasised in Chapter Six of this thesis. Wisdom, a study participant in Ghana, presents further nuances in the contradictions below:

Well, when they call me, it is also because they need something. They would usually ask me to do something on their behalf. But one of the issues is that for the average Ghanaian who lives abroad, once you call them to inform them of any need you have, they hastily assume that anytime you call them, it is because you need something from them. There was a time I had an issue, and I discussed it with my friend, Alex. After that, anytime I called him, the answering machine would respond, and I had to leave a message. So, one day, I told him that, 'Master, I am not after your money. I discussed the issue with you because of how I used to help you in the past'. Later he sent a message that he is sorry, he was busy. So, the next day he called me for a long conversation. You know, any person needs to be very discerning of the action of the people he/she relates to. So, I told him all those hard-felt feelings I had towards him. I told him that 'Massa, when you need me to make any enquiries for you, I do not hesitate, so do not assume that I am after your money, which is not the case. (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

The input from Wisdom helps us to appreciate that migrants also make demands from their relations in Ghana, and thus their selective avoidance to limit the potential for freeloading is unfounded. Despite this, some other studies point to how migrants capitalise on distance as a powerful tool to negotiate how they relate and react to the demands of their relations (See, for example, Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Coe, 2011; Tazanu, 2015). Thus, given that anyone migrant has a large number of relations in the homeland than relations in the homeland have migrant

relatives abroad, the strain of freeloading is felt more by relations abroad. During the field interviews, all but one of the six participants abroad expressed that their relations make too many demands from them given the relative ease of doing so with contemporary technologies. The exceptional case was from a female participant whose migration project was initiated by her parents, who funded her university education in North America. She indicated that her family does not expect much from her, given that she had just begun her post-university career.

The culture of indirection is also manifest in transnational freeloading through sharing videos made by third parties via communication platforms such as WhatsApp. I received two such videos when I was in Austria from November 2018 to January 2019. In one of such cartoon videos produced by *Madlipz gh* titled '@Breggle', Breggle calls his uncle abroad and informs him that he has heard he would be returning to Ghana soon, which the uncle affirmed. Breggle later added that his uncle should be careful to bring him a gift during his visit. Otherwise, he would not fulfil his service obligation to him as his nephew. The video with a playtime of eleven seconds provides the opportunity for those who circulate it to imprint on the consciousness of recipients that there is a covert demand beneath the fun.

The second video provides a rendition of a 2018 song titled '*Bronya Ade*' by *Abusuapanin Chiki*, a contemporary Ghanaian music artist. The singer insinuates that he expects his networks abroad to send his Christmas present to him. He implied in the song that the present is an expected custom that his networks abroad reneged the previous year. He emphasised that the present is to enable him to defray his debts. Interestingly, in both the '@Breggle' video and the second, there is a silent message that the request seen as an attempt at freeloading is based on a mutual practice of reciprocity. However, that assumption can be seen to reflect an awareness of the norm of reciprocity rather than its mutual realisation, as some persons remain unable to reciprocate the

benevolence of their kin (Kleist, 2017). The popularity of such videos also portrays that freeloading is a pervasive phenomenon.

#### **5.4 Summary and Conclusion**

The chapter has highlighted the challenges and tensions in transnational interactions over changing technologies for communication. An emphasis is placed on how the tensions and conflicts are patterned by the kinship bond, particularly in contemporary times, as families interact in a multi-modal environment and by the period of the interaction. In the older technological era, the ability to communicate with each other was inhibited by cost, limited means and poor infrastructure. The means available were snail-paced mail delivery systems where families exchanged letters and audio cassettes in a rigid institutional setting. The rigidities hampered the provisioning of postage and later telephone services.

Consequently, the rigidities resulted in expensive calls, whether at a communication centre or a payphone booth, loss of privacy as the interactions took place in public spaces such as a neighbour's house, and delays as more people competed to use the limited avenues for communication. These occurrences resulted in the sparsity of communication and high financial toll, particularly for relations abroad. Therefore, very few relations could interact, leading to frequent accusations of neglect or avoidance when migrants visit home. The sparsity of interactions was experienced among all the categories of kin as the constraints emanated from the macro level. However, regular migrants and their relations in Accra were better off than irregular migrants and their relations in Nkoranza in terms of access to the limited services and infrastructure. Irregular migrants who mainly used the northern route to Libya had greater

difficulty interacting with their relations en route and in the early phases of settling in their destinations.

In contrast, the contemporary technological era presents substantially reduced costs of interactions due to factors such as the development of new technologies and the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector. Given all these innovations, relations can communicate in a multi-modal environment and exchange audio, voice, video, and text-based content via an internet-based application such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Migrants and their relations back home can now communicate more intensely and frequently in a multi-sensory environment. These developments have also brought newer forms of challenges such as surveillance and transnational freeloading. Surveillance practices are patterned by the kinship bond and are not influenced by one's migration status.

Parents often follow their migrant children on social media. They also position themselves to be constantly available when called and are open to third parties' validation of their children's (mis)conduct, especially when parents migrate and leave children behind. They do all these to ensure that children become rooted in the Ghanaian society through practices such as marriage to a Ghanaian, investment in buildings and other income-generating projections. Parents also use the multi-modal environment to promote desirable values in their children, whether at home or abroad. The intensity of the surveillance sometimes causes children to resent it when they feel parents intrude too much into their affairs.

Among couples, surveillance is used to ensure the exclusivity of sexual rights. Exclusive sexual rights, however, are challenged by traditional cultural norms of polygyny, prolonged separation of couples, and social pressures, particularly on men to engage in extramarital affairs. These factors

enforce patriarchal norms that centre the surveillance primarily on wives than their husbands. The gaze of the community that crisscrosses the transnational space through surveillance reports sent by third parties at both ends represents a culturally embedded response to ensure that the conduct of couples becomes socially approved. Fallouts lead to disruptions such as divorce and marital strife, which are sometimes normalised through mediation.

Further, siblings and extended relations use surveillance to ensure that the interests of relations abroad, such as oversight responsibilities on buildings and business projects and care for children at home, are guaranteed. Relations in this category also capitalise on the ease of reaching each other to prospect for freeloading avenues. When relations are found culpable of misguided conduct, disruptive tendencies such as selective avoidance and resentments arise. Other challenges such as emotional strain, physical exhaustion and abuse of privacy also emerge as relations spend more time interacting with each other on the modern communication tools.

Technologies for transnational interactions, therefore, provide a two-sided experience for families. Opportunities for heightened interactions are riddled with tensions and conflicts (Alexander, 2013), some of which are strong enough to break the kinship bond. Thus, the increasing availability of communication technologies enables the building of connecting bridges between migrants and their relations back home (Levitt, 2001b; Vertovec, 2004). At the same time, the increased connectivity presents occasions for tensions and conflicts, which sometimes undermine the relationship (Hannaford, 2015; Silva, 2018; Tazanu, 2015)

## CHAPTER SIX

### “ALWAYS ON... BUT OFF...”: PATTERN OF TRANSNATIONAL INTERACTIONS WITH CURRENT ICT

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I pay attention to the more or less stable outcomes of the processes of interactions among transnational families. These outcomes are expressed in the somehow contradictory phrase succinctly presented by Blessed, a 31-year old participant of the study who lives in Ghana with her husband and children and maintains varying degrees of interactions with her numerous relations abroad:

I interact with my dad all the time. When I was at the university, he used to call me whenever he got the time. He knew my schedule – when I was at a lecture or not, he knew my friends and even managed to get the contact of my best friend. Anytime he called me, and I didn't answer, he would call my friend. Now that I am married, with kids and working, that has influenced our frequency of interaction, but we still maintain a very strong bond of communication whenever we both have space. On weekends, he calls me on the video to interact with my kids. Sometimes, he even calls my husband. I also communicate quite often with my aunt abroad, my mother's sister; she is the fourth born. I had a relationship with her when she was in Ghana. She is there with her family. The rest, it is only 'hello', 'hi' and 'how are the kids doing that is all. In essence, I am **always on** when it comes to interactions with my dad, but when it comes to my interactions with my other relations abroad, I am kind of **off** with them. (Blessed, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019).

The phrase 'always on but off', as highlighted by Blessed, merges the different ways migrants and their non-migrant relations experience interactions. On the one hand, transnational families keep an active presence in the lives of specific family members to an appreciable limit that blurs the spatial gap. On the other hand, these families use distance to shield themselves from other members, thereby creating and enacting the boundaries of relatedness in more porous patterns. Blessed thus distinguishes her interactions with her father from other relations based on the density

of conversations. Smith, a participant of the study whose wife of 8 years is abroad, also explained that “even though my wife is abroad, I feel that she is here with me, we text, call and check-in on each other all the time” (Smith, 15th May 2019).

Therefore, the usage of contemporary communication technology brings closeness and, at the same time, heightens awareness of distance among families, creating a two-sided interactional experience. The two-sided interactional experience happens when the pronounced visibility of transnational families, due to the ubiquitous nature of contemporary communication technologies, leads to closeness for some and silent distance for others, thereby remarking the boundaries of relatedness. Interactions among spatially bounded families also entail boundaries for practical reasons. The need for boundaries arises because interaction needs an investment of time and other material resources, which can prove exorbitant when extended to a broad base of family members. However, when mutual visibility of relations does not result in the enactment of the bonds of familiarity, one is always left to wonder if those bonds exist at all. Whereas spatially bounded families are not always rendered visible to each other, transnational families who constantly play out their interactional lives using communication technologies are always visible. Thus, the salience of how these technologies pattern their interactional lives.

Second, the pattern that emerges when transnational families interact with each other is reflective of the transformations in social interactions in a virtual space. In transnational interactions, the socio-cultural dynamics of the interaction itself, the spatial distance between the interacting pairs and the technological medium, become integral in defining the outcomes of the interactions (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003; Levitt, 2004; Postman, 1992; Sacasas, 2020). Thus, when transnational families interact virtually, they actively engage with the constraints and opportunities of communication technologies, their socio-cultural repertoires and the spatial and temporal gap

that separate them. In terms of perspectives, these insights reflect social constructivism and technological determinism on the place of technology in society.

Technological determinism as a perspective emphasises how the use of technology shapes our social experiences. Postman (1992), for example, compares this influence to ecological change, which alters the entire structure of the environment to a different state. Thus, new technologies are not merely material artefacts that humans subdue and manipulate for their purposes. Technologies by their design can bring about far-reaching changes that neither the inventors nor users fully grasp. For example, one can blame the so-called ‘fake news’ that ‘experts’ warn the unassuming public about, especially during the COVID-19 period, on the influence of the internet and smartphones in making social media posts go viral. The ‘fake news’ nevertheless provide alternative narratives to prominent and influential media sources, which in the past had hegemony over ‘truthful’ news narratives.

The influence of media such as WhatsApp also creates heightened visibility and extends the self to multiple locations through its multimodal platform for exchanging information. At the same time, as humans exercise their agency over the use of technology, they construct the extent to which technologies can shape their lives (Silverstone et al., 2005) – as espoused by the social constructivist perspective. People determine when to go online, answer their phones, or respond to a text message. Additionally, one’s ability to craft what information is shared is another way to determine how one’s life would be shaped by communication technology.

This chapter, therefore, pays attention to how communication technologies, particularly WhatsApp, the performative act of communication and the spatial separation of families, create a stable and shifting ‘always on but off’ pattern of interaction among transnational families.

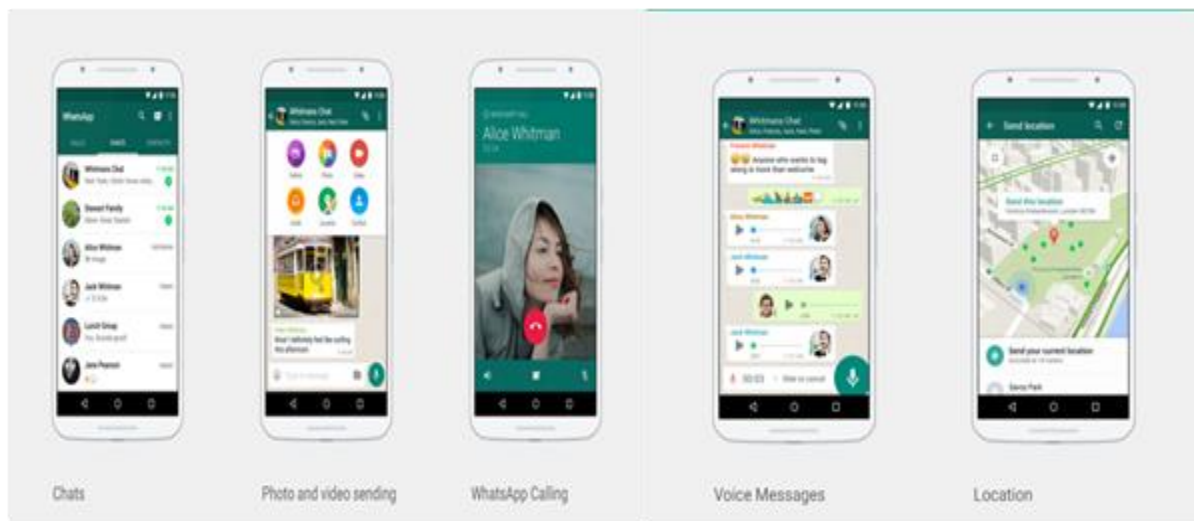
## **6.2 WhatsApp: Technology Facilitating an “Always on ...But Off...” Pattern**

All the sixty-one participants of the study indicated that they use WhatsApp to varying degrees in their contemporary interactions with their families abroad. This VOIP application is not used exclusively. Participants also highlighted using others such as Skype, Facebook, Imo, WeChat, traditional public switched telephone network (PSTN), also known as plain old telephone service (POTS) and sometimes human couriers. However, the emphasis placed on WhatsApp is due to its popularity with study participants in particular and more generally among a wide range of users, both in Ghana and across the world (Church & de Oliveira, 2013; Elul, 2019; O’Hara et al., 2014). Elul (2019), for example, in his ethnographic study of the modern expression of privacy in Tema, an industrial city of the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, found that when one considers social media as a site for privacy, WhatsApp becomes a favoured medium. According to Elul (ibid), WhatsApp, based on its architecture, is a preferred medium for interactions across generations. It helps sustain the culture of ‘indirection’ and apprehension on uncontrolled public display of one’s private life. Therefore, unlike Facebook, where one does not have total control over how far a particular post can trend through reposting and tagging, WhatsApp limits the extent to which a person’s post can be source referenced. Messages posted on WhatsApp can be sourced referenced by a group of which one is a member of or one’s WhatsApp contact list. Thus, the architecture of WhatsApp blends well with the socio-cultural milieu of public exposure and privacy in Ghana.

Since the introduction of WhatsApp in February 2009, new features have been progressively added to it to improve user experiences. Now, users can chat in groups or one-on-one basis, make video calls in pairs or a group of up to eight (8) persons, share multimedia files and their locations, give updates of their status as well as customize their profiles with photos, texts, and symbols – emojis (See figure 6.0 below). In 2014, the ‘read receipt’ indicator was introduced, which gives senders

of particular messages the assurance that the intended recipients have read or at least seen the message. Additionally, some user preferences offered can enable persons in one's WhatsApp contact list to know when the person was last seen online (WhatsApp, 2020). These user preferences can also be used to modify how particular persons in one's WhatsApp contact list encounter the person's online presence, among others.

**Figure 6.0: Photo grid of WhatsApp Functionalities**



<https://whatsappbrand.com/> accessed on Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2020

These features of the WhatsApp application, as outlined, are integral to an appreciation of how its architecture as a medium of communication shapes the social experiences of users. First, particular features of WhatsApp extend the virtual self to the extent that it empowers users to have an appreciable first-hand knowledge of activities or lack thereof in multiple locations. This knowledge has several ramifications for the social experiences of users. One of such is that it helps establish boundaries of relatedness, where family and non-family members are created irrespective of traditional kinship bonds. Wisdom, a participant of the study who has some of his in-laws and uncle abroad, sheds light on some of the ways the boundary creation processes take place:

I communicate more often with my in-laws than even my maternal uncle abroad. I believe that we are all grown-ups who understand the unspoken gestures of those that we relate with. If you send someone a WhatsApp message and you see through your phone that the message has been delivered and seen by the person and he chooses not to respond until, say after three or four days, it should tell you that the person is not interested in you or your message and so you take a cue from it. That is how my uncle is. I believe his actions are beyond the fact that he is busy working multiple jobs abroad. (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

Wisdom's assertion above has several implications, which would be given further elaborations in subsequent sections of this chapter. However, it is essential to note here that he points our attention to how users determine the 'truth' based on the features of WhatsApp. Thus, Wisdom can determine through the notification feature that his uncle is or has been online but has side-lined his message. Thus, unlike in previous technological epochs where accounts of reality, given the functionalities of media such as letters sent through the post office or calls placed on fixed phone lines, were constructed in discrete singular accounts, contemporary technologies present the avenue to construct reality simultaneously from multiple accounts. For example, as already noted in Chapter Five, Uncle Agyenim, a participant of the study, indicates that due to sorting errors by the then Ghana Post and Telecommunications Department, letters sent to him by his family were usually delayed. In such circumstances, it took only him (when he finally got the letter with a trace of the erroneous delivery) to shed light on the sequence of events to his family in Ghana before they could come to a reasonable determination of what caused the delay and break in their temporal patterns of interactions. This contrasts with the current technologies, which allows any particular group of family members interacting with each other to form a reasonable conclusion of what the reality may be through a combination of features the technological medium provides.

In another example, Abi, a 36-year old participant who has her siblings abroad, highlights the ways through which the technological features of WhatsApp help her to initiate contact with her sister and vice versa:

Any time she sees me online, she calls me. When I've not heard from her in a while, I also call her when I see her online. You know it's possible to see those online on WhatsApp. Sometimes when I read her status, I comment on them. (Abi, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

When Abi highlights that she calls her sister when she sees her online, she underscores that she can assume that her sister is free and available for a conversation through her online presence. Even though the reality from her sister's perspective may be far from her assumption, this notwithstanding, she indicates that she assumes correctly, at least in most cases. Further, her sister communicates to a wider pool of her contacts through her WhatsApp status updates. These contacts may also see those updates as an invitation for a chat, thereby creating varying levels of awareness or co-presence – 'ambient', intense (Alinejad, 2019; Madianou, 2016).

The preceding resonates with McLuhan (1994/1964/1964) assertion that 'the medium is the message'. This phrase means that technologies introduce new structures of sensibilities and categories that shape all other structures and systems the technology engage. Thus, in essence, current communication technologies blur the boundaries between the embodied self and the virtual self (Gergen, 2004; Licoppe, 2004), enabling users to be 'here and there' (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 2003). This blurring of boundaries consequently facilitates one's ability to participate in different environments and spaces simultaneously. At the same time, it puts one in a position to 'know' things first-hand, despite or in addition to other people's constructions of the 'knowledge'.

Given its multimodal usage, transnational families exchange information that enriches their interactional experiences. Pokuaa, a participant of the study whose husband is abroad, says, "Anytime my husband wants to see our baby, he calls on video. This way, he can see her as if he is here with her" (Pokuaa, 23rd May 2019). Pokuaa is, therefore, able to share live moments of her baby, who is yet to acquire language skills with her husband in ways that enable him to see the baby "as if he is here with her," as Pokuaa puts it. WhatsApp as a contemporary medium offers

avenues for sharing multimedia files and video calls at no cost except for data charges. These avenues shape the conversation's content and expand the horizon of shared memories for family members who are constantly in touch with each other.

In the preceding, I highlight how technology determines human interactions by elaborating on particular features of the WhatsApp application and how these features increase gazing and provide avenues for enriched interactions. In the subsequent sections, I elaborate on how social actors adapt to the technological features of WhatsApp, leading to increased incidence of impression management and a closely knitted bond of affection for the section of families who are 'always on' and, conversely, extended invisibility and passive virtual presence for those who are 'off'.

### **6.3 When “Always On”**

An 'always on' presence emphasises the perpetual and intense interactions among dyads of kin who form a 'core family'. The pattern, as already noted, blurs the boundaries between the virtual self and the embodied self. The boundary conflation introduces two dynamics to the social interactions that need emphasis. The first is that it brings about a constant gaze. Second, a closely-knitted relationship is formed, reinforced and maintained by the heightened multi-modal interactions through mediums such as voice calls, video calls, chats and voice notes.

In the following sub-sections, I elaborate on the manifestations and outcomes of these two dynamics, which also points to the mixed blessing of communication technologies.

### ***6.3.1 The Socially Adapted Gaze of Communication Technology***

Contemporary communication technologies enable the self to be extended into multiple locations given the multimodal contact medium (McLuhan, 1994/1964). This extension occurs through an ‘ambient co-presence’- the peripheral awareness of distant others enabled by current communication technologies (Madianou, 2016) – and an actively engaged virtual co-presence. This perpetual visibility creates a heightened awareness by the monitored ‘other’ to always present a front that may appear desirable by the monitor. Given the constant gaze, study participants highlighted the various ways in which their transnational families continuously monitored their actions and activities. Fred, for example, highlights how he crafts his communication with his wife abroad to avoid any suspicion of infidelity given their constant multi-modal interaction with current technologies.

If I am going to do something, I don’t want her to get the slightest idea. Maybe let’s say I am going out to the beach and I am going with a certain girl whom I may not be in a relationship with, but the mere fact I am going with a girl would make you out there think about a lot of things. Going on to explain to you that she is not my girlfriend would be like I am adding petrol to the fire or whatever. So simply, I would just tell you that ‘I am going to the beach, I am going with friends’; generalise everything just so we don’t have that kind of confrontation, and she would not dig further (Fred, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

Fred uses the term ‘generalise’ to mask all the details he feels may be undesirable in his interactions with his wife. In this way, he is able, as a social subject, to determine how his social life is shaped by his usage of contemporary communication technology, given its intrusive nature.

The constant gaze blurs the boundaries between the ‘front’ and the ‘back’ stage (Goffman, 1959) as the ‘other’ is virtually present even backstage where at least social actors are supposed to have some level of privacy away from the gaze of the ‘other’. Thus, unlike Goffman’s (ibid) articulation of impression management in social interactions, where the ‘front stage’ and the ‘backstage’ present two distinct spaces of the actor’s engagement, interactions with contemporary technologies

conflate the two spaces. Thus, the social actor is less able to assume her innate self backstage. Therefore, the ubiquity of contemporary technologies creates a perpetual tendency to present the ‘front stage’ person, whether in a public or a private space.

One may assume, for example, that the monitored person may decide not to answer a call placed by their family member or may choose not to respond to a text message to forestall continuous exchanges that may lead to the need to manage one’s responses. However, the gazing apparatus is presented in multiple ways, including community members and other family members who are frequently called upon as external verification points when the need arises. Further, when contact routines are breached, it heightens anxieties that can sometimes create suspicions of infidelity (Mahler, 2001) and of other actions that the other relation perceives as ill-motivated. The various forms of community surveillance and its manifestations have been discussed extensively in Chapter Five. Konadu, a 21-year old student who has both parents abroad, points further to how her mother uses the gaze of the community to monitor and control his actions:

I do some activities on behalf of my mother. For example, during festive occasions like Christmas and Easter, she sends me money to be distributed among her network of friends and benefactors in the community. I also oversee her building project. She has never had cause to doubt what I do for her. However, I would not be surprised that her confidence in me is based on reports she receives from people in the community of which I am not aware. On one particular occasion, she informed me that she is aware that I drive her car that she has parked at home around town and that I should be careful not to get myself into trouble while driving. I asked her how she got to know, and she only informed me that she has got her eyes on me (Konadu, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020).

Thus, the technological and community gaze blend to shape the scope of things and events made visible to the physically absent family who seems to make a windfall from technological availability, albeit not without the possibility of impression management by the monitored ‘other’.

Given this context, information exchanged by transnational families is in some cases taken as ‘truth’ in the absence of a contrary account. Thus, even though the recipients are very much aware

that the accounts of the ‘truth’ may have been sacrificed on the altar of impression management, they hold on to them. Agya Okyere, a 65-year old who has a number of his children and some other extended family members abroad, commented on how he evaluates his virtual interactions with his children abroad:

The mobile phone is like communication with God. We haven’t seen God before, but we believe he is there. It’s the same with mobile phones. We don’t know if what they are telling us is the truth, but we believe them anyway. If they are lying to us, I believe the truth will be revealed. I know a friend whose wife lied to him concerning where she was. In the process of communication, she mistakenly revealed the truth, and so the husband realized she was lying. It’s better to see people physically, but migration is a part of our reality, so we can only be content with it. We use mobile phones with faith (Agya Okyere, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019).

The assertions by Agya Okyere highlight the limited weight that transnational families place on the truth claims of each other, even without a concrete alternative truth narrative. This limited appreciation of ‘truth’ accounts points to the widespread appreciation that current technologies for communication readily predispose users to manage their social fronts. It is interesting to note that the telephone, and more closely the mobile phone, in Twi (an indigenous language of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana) is *ahomatorofo*, which is translated literally as ‘liar line’. Added to the high tendency to ‘lie’ when communicating virtually is the cultural preference of not revealing ‘hard truth’ to recipients at the forefront, ostensibly to show respect, limit the damaging impact of the account, and also to show shame and remorse. These communication repertoires are undergirded by the culture of indirection that characterises social interactions in Ghana (Obeng, 2003; Yankah, 1991).

Agya Okyere also indicates that it is not always possible to sustain a lie in a given interaction. Sometimes, there is the tendency to stumble upon the hidden truth as it is revealed inadvertently by the person trying to make things up. At other times too, incidents that both parties have little or

no control over occur in the contact processes that provide more compelling evidence to the inquirer. Mama Eunice, a participant of the study in her 60s who initially had her husband abroad, and later some of her children, comments below on how she discovered that her husband had married someone else abroad:

My daughter called her father abroad one Christmas season, and then a lady answered the phone. After their ensuing conversation, we got to know that my husband had married someone abroad without our knowledge, and he claimed it was to enable him to get legal documentation as he was an irregular migrant. (Mama Eunice, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019)

The prevalence of such incidents of stumbling upon evidential truth as recounted by Agya Okyere and Mama Eunice is nevertheless occasioned by the high frequency of interactions, which becomes a virtual gaze that an ‘always on’ presence presents. In addition to the ‘chanced’ occurrences pointing to the difficulty of curtailing the intrusive nature of current communication technologies, others also use the technologies strategically to ensure compliance with certain standards of behaviour. Anna, a 27-year old participant of the study, recounts how her migrant father used to call her and her other siblings at a particular hour during the day and used the mobile phone to do a covert headcount to ensure that his children spent their nights at home and not roaming in the community:

Formerly, before all my siblings went to school, he used to call at 9 o’clock in the evenings. When he called, he made sure to talk to everyone in the house. So, if it was your turn to talk to him and you weren’t around, then it meant you had gone out. The next day he would call you and ask where you went. If you were unable to answer, he would reprimand you (Anna, 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Thus, even though Anna’s father is not physically present with his children in Ghana, he is able, through current technologies, to extend himself to them to determine how his children should behave.

In a nutshell, as social actors engage with the technological features of WhatsApp, it leads to their ability to see beyond their immediate physical environment to multiple other locations simultaneously. In fact, what is seen may not be all that there is to be seen – as those who are constantly gazed upon become overwhelmed with the intrusive nature of the virtual presence of their physically absent family. This then brings about a great effort to manage their front stages. The socio-cultural preference of indirection and discreet display of one's private life is constantly engaged to counter the obstructive visibility created by the new communication technologies. These invariably lead to made-up truths, stumbled-upon facts and a shared awareness of the façade. This reality becomes the lived experiences of a section of transnational families, at least from the perspective of the study participants. This notwithstanding, technology is not always seen as an overbearing reality that must be endured. In other instances, it brings families together in closely-knitted bonds that make the transnational experience a bearable one. I, therefore, turn attention now to this category of families whose experiences with technology are the other end of the pole.

### ***6.3.2 Closely-Knitted Interactions – Social Adaptation to Multimodal Contact***

Social interaction is the means through which the social self is born, nurtured, reinforced, and adapted to its environment. Among transnational families, the family becomes a practice (Morgan, 1996) that is acted out daily and therefore; social interactions become central as much as it is for spatially bounded family units. At the same time, meaningful social interactions require a social setting, medium and social actors. Whereas these prerequisites for interactions come easily for spatially-bounded families, the same cannot be said of transnational families. Given their spatial separation, a mutually understood language is not enough as an appropriate medium for social

interactions. The language must be facilitated by technology for the interaction to take place. As has already been noted, technologies for interactions shape and are shaped by culture.

Thus, in older technological epochs where the technologies available facilitated, for the most part, asynchronous exchanges, the avenues for interactions were largely limited to those that met basic existential needs. Affective components of interactions were minimal, unlike in contemporary times. Auntie Adwoa, a 57-year old participant of the study who has several relations abroad, including her children, siblings, uncles and aunts, highlights the range of things she discussed with her brother, who has been abroad for more than 35 years, during his early years as a migrant:

In those days, there were no phones, so we used to use cassettes. He spoke and recorded on the cassette, and when he found someone who was coming to Ghana, he would send it to us, and we would play and listen. We would also record it on a cassette and give it to the person to return to him. If he doesn't send us a message, we don't interact. Thus, he was the one who would initiate any interaction, and we responded as a form of feedback. So, we didn't have enough room to talk to each other, and therefore we focused on what was pressing. When he left, for example, we didn't have a place of our own, so I told him to come back home and build a house for us to live in. We were living in other peoples' houses. My mother lived at ..., she had rented a house there, and so when we went there, we all lived in the same room. So, I told him he should come back and build [a house] for the woman. So, he came and built a self-contained house and later a storey building at... for the woman. I also told him to invest in cattle-rearing... So, he bought the cattle, and we looked for a Fulani to rear them. In those days, I used to tell him to arrange for some of the children here to join him but initially, things were not going well, so it didn't happen. (Auntie Adwoa, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

The narrative above from Auntie Adwoa highlights how the available technologies structure how transitional families interact with each other. Given the constraints of the feedback period, the capacity of the technology used for the exchange<sup>5</sup>, and the transmission mechanism, the content of the information always had to be crafted in a way that focused on the salient issues of the sender.

---

<sup>5</sup> cassettes used for normal audio recordings had an average recording capacity of 90 minutes – with 45 minutes on each side

How available technologies structure interactions is given further elaborations by Thomas and Znaniecki (1918, p. 337) in their classical studies on the transnational interactions among Polish peasant families and their migrant relations in the United States. W. Wroblewski, a participant of the study in his letter to his brothers in the US, gives accounts of religious happenings back in the homeland, how a promised remittance would be spent, farming and security issues and concludes by highlighting that, ‘I wrote you what I could about our country, although in short, for if I wanted to write in detail, I should need many sheets of paper.’ The constraints with technology, therefore, pushed interactions with an affective component to the periphery. One may surmise that the constraints with technology shaped the experiences of migrants so much that scholarly work on migrants and migration until the last two decades paid more attention to the basic needs outcomes and precursors such as remittances, pull-push factors, to the neglect of their affective needs (Mai & King, 2009). Transnational families, therefore, relied more on other channels in maintaining affective bonds such as mental memories, photographs and old letters (Baldassar, 2008).

Further, in the older technological epoch, a great effort had to be invested by families in any given interaction in contrast to contemporary periods. This contrast is highlighted below by Auntie Adwoa:

Initially, we didn't hear anything from her. So, if someone was coming down from their end to the Ashanti Region, then she would ask the person to come and check up on how we were doing. So, in that case, the person would come here and say our sister had sent him here to come and see how we were doing. Yeah...so we weren't seeing and hearing from each other. But now, things have changed due to modern technology... I have spoken with her for over an hour just this morning. We can now make video calls where we see each other, but it wasn't so previously (Auntie Adwoa, 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

When Auntie Adwoa emphasises that “but now, things have changed due to modern technology...”, she provides a celebratory note on the offerings of contemporary technologies in affective care for transnational families. Given this transformation, one of the key results is the

avenue for building, maintaining and reinforcing bonds of affection. This manifests in prolonged multimodal contact with a core section of relatives, leading to closely-knit families living in different nation-states. Mama Elsie, a participant of the study in her early 70s, highlights how her interactional life with her daughter, who lives in the Netherlands with her own nuclear family, is shaped by contemporary communication technologies:

There are times she calls frequently. There are other times it takes some time before we hear from each other. There are times I miss her, and so I call her. There are times she also calls me when she misses me. I am even able to speak to her through a video call. It makes us very happy. We can talk for over 2 hours. Sometimes when her children are around, I also get the opportunity to also speak with them. They speak both Twi and Dutch. (Mama Elsie, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019)

Mama Elsie's account above demonstrates that even when older children leave home to form their own nuclear families, they do not allow the demands of the care work in the nuclear family to limit their interactions with their parents, particularly given the ease with which they can do so in recent times. Further, the increased tendency for migrant children to heighten their transnational activities when their parents are alive is given greater force with new technologies. Both children and parents can deal with their feelings of nostalgia with a phone call (Baldassar, 2008).

Additionally, older siblings who have formed their own nuclear families also reinforce their interactions with contemporary communication technologies. In the quotation below, Abi, a 36-year old participant, highlights how the new communication technologies aid her interaction with her migrant sister:

You don't have to wait in a queue to talk to her. You can call any moment. Even if you want to see her appearance or how she is growing, you can see that. Sometimes, she lines her children up for me to see them whenever we call each other on video. Sometimes when she is eating, she takes a picture and sends it to us. I am really happy with how we can share our lives (Abi, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019).

Abi highlights that the bonds of affection spread across generations, from siblings to aunts and nieces/nephews. Also, the scope of the interactions expands to every day, taken for granted activities such as eating. This expanded scope of interactions enriches each other's experiences of the shared transnational space. Levitt (2001b), in her study of the transnational lives of Miraflores families in the Dominican Republic and their relations in Jamaica Plain, a neighbourhood in Boston, Massachusetts, highlights how the use of communication technologies results in a Jamaica Plain experience in Miraflores and vice versa. For example, in the growing interest in Basketball in Miraflores because it is a popular sport in Boston. Migrants are therefore able to share a wider range of their experiences with their families in such depth as to create a desire to partake of those experiences. Wisdom, for example, highlights that:

Sometimes my sister-in-law would call me on video, and she would ask about the food we are eating. When I inform her that ooh, it is yam and kontomire stew, she would say that she is nostalgic about such meals, and we make plans with her to send some of such local foodstuff to her (Wisdom, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2019).

In this way, interactions within the transnational space become more than an avenue for building material resources through the circular flow of remittances, but also for the exchange of affections, sharing of experiences and the provisioning of the means to participate in those experiences.

There are important linkages between the material and immaterial resource flows. Affective bonds produce material outcomes such as when the nostalgia to eat yam and kontomire stew by Wisdom's in-law resulted in the sending of local food to her abroad. This is even more pronounced in the lives of couples. During fieldwork, I observed that couples who reported frequent interactions with each other (12 out of the total of 21 participants who are in transnational unions) also reported frequent visits from their partners abroad, at least twice a year. The only caveat here is for irregular migrants, who generally risk ending their migration projects when they visit the homeland. Among

the 12 participants also, 4 migrated to join their partners abroad within that same period, and the other 8 were in various stages of preparations to also migrate. Two of those persons who are preparing to migrate emphasised that one requirement for obtaining a visa to join a spouse abroad is proof of interactions – and in their cases, they shared some transcripts of their WhatsApp conversations. Indeed, formal institutions that deal with the reunification of transnational families now rely on a digital trace of interactions as a form of a background check. Couples planning to reunite therefore have more compelling reasons to heighten their interactions with each other given the offerings of contemporary communication technologies.

Among all the dyads of kin interviewed, couples, particularly those in the initial stages of their unions, demonstrated greater versatility in their use of communication technologies and also expressed greater bonds of affection. One reason for this is that a number of them (5 out of 21) were in transnational courtship before their marriage and therefore built their relationship from the beginning with communication technologies. Further, their age cohort (in their late 20s to mid-30s) becomes an excellent explanatory variable. Some scholars suggest that one's age influences the usage of contemporary communication technologies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; Prensky, 2006; Tapscott, 2009). Lastly, their transnational experiences are quite recent and are yet to be tested with the realities of living long term in such unions. Some of those realities include being overburdened with hands-on care, heightened surveillance, inadequate avenues for expressing sexual needs and living with regular suspicions of the fidelity of one's partner.

Asantewaa, a 29-year old participant in the study, whose husband of 3 years has been abroad for 9 years, highlights the various ways she uses technology to interact with him:

We are always in touch with each other, primarily through voice calls. When he wants to see his child or see those of us here, and when we also want to see him, we do a video call.

A video call is just like being face-to-face with him, so he sees it as me being there with him, and it's the same for me too. We also use voice notes when we do not desire any immediate feedback. We usually talk about our life. We discuss how we'll live our life with the children when our desire for reunification materialises and all that. He is my husband, and so we talk as we would've if he was here physically. Also, if something happens in this town or where he is, we talk about it. Further, as I oversee the construction of our house, we also talk about those issues, he sends remittances, and I coordinate the purchase of materials and hiring of labourers to work on it. Sometimes when we miss each other so much, we have virtual sex and both of us like the experience! (Asantewaa, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Asantewaa's assertion that "he is my husband and so we talk as we would have if he were here physically" communicates in a powerful way that her husband's physical absence in no way limits their interactions. Therefore, the scope of their communication is diversified to all areas of concern and, most importantly, their sexual needs, which they satisfy through virtual sex. Even though some transnational couples find virtual sex to be less satisfying (Adiku, 2017), Ben-Ze'ev (2004, p. 132) provides nuanced insight on the value of virtual sex despite its limitation of lack of physical contact thus:

The limitation of online sexual activities – that is, the lack of physical contact – is advantageous from a different perspective: it forces participants to compensate for this absence by being more sensitive to other aspects that constitute an enjoyable sexual activity. In cybersex, where sexual activity is based on communication, the two people must respond to each other and be verbally sensitive to each other to keep the fantasy going. A blank screen cannot do that. In this sense, cybersex should be highly reciprocal, and hence it often involves consideration of the other person as having an intrinsic value. In contrast, in offline sex, one of the partners can be relatively passive.

Younger couples can have a different kind of experience in their transnational unions, given their versatile usage of communication technologies. Additionally, communication technologies become a vital tool for couples to grow their bonds of affection and intimacy with the usage of multimodal interactions. In this sense, couples express their bonds of affection in how they use the technologies while, at the same time, the technological features enrich those expressions (Alinejad, 2019).

Parents also use contemporary communication technologies to extend their parenting obligations with their children in ways that also bring each of them closer. George, a 22-year old participant of the study who has had both parents abroad since he was 14 years old - mother in Liberia and Father in Italy, highlights the frequency of his interactions with his parents in the following words:

I talk to my mother and father almost every day. We do WhatsApp chat and WhatsApp call. Our conversations are all about the family. They also advise me now and then - to be a good boy, to go to school, not to follow bad friends and those sorts of things. Sometimes too, we talk about happenings in the country where they live. For example, the last conversation I had with my father in that regard was about Berlusconi. I read something online, and I asked him for confirmation. I read that he had been arrested, and he said they could not arrest him because he is very influential, and also, the case was not one that guarantees that he be arrested. Sometimes too, he calls through video to show me some places over there (George, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Through his daily contact with his parents, George can draw from their counsel and share in their world through interactions that extend beyond their existential needs as a family. George highlights that he engages his father on current affairs of his destination region, and through those discussions, they cement their affective bonds. Thus, one does not necessarily have to migrate to experience another culture or society, as the transnational space is shared in such a way that non-migrants encounter the new destinations of their migrant relatives in a profound and personal way (Levitt, 2001b). These heightened interactions limit the emotional gap between children and parents and provide avenues to positively shape children's life course (Parreñas, 2003).

In sum, in the older technological epochs, transnational families' interactions were mainly limited to basic existential needs due to the limited availability of technologies to facilitate the interactions. Presently, however, communication technologies extend the interactions to both material and immaterial ends of affective exchanges and the co-sharing of experiences. In some cases, immaterial interactions are extended to produce tangible material outcomes that stretch the benefit of those interactions. Here, the emotional outcomes of the interactions are not ephemeral but

extended through material outcomes such as visits, reunions and exchange of remittances. Indeed, they embody the results of successful ‘interaction rituals’ where the outcome of the interaction is objectified (Collins, 2004). This conclusion shows that through their ‘always on’ usage pattern, transnational families can employ current communication technologies to enrich their interactional experiences.

#### **6.4 When “Off”**

Despite the ubiquitous nature of contemporary technologies, they do not always lead to enhanced interactions among transnational families. Family members actively define and refine who forms part of their core family and who does not due to two key reasons. First is the desire to avoid transnational freeloading, as explained in the previous chapter. Second, for practical reasons - given the investment of time and other resources needed to sustain interactions. Being ‘off’ with a family member does not entail the absence of interactions. Otherwise, a transnational relationship cannot be assumed to exist, but rather that those interactions are few and far between. They are mostly occasioned when there is a communal ritual such as funerals. Therefore, this pattern of interaction does not sustain the notion that contemporary technologies of communication heighten the bond between transnational families. In this case, these technologies bring about a sharp sense of avoidance through limited and calculated usage, underscoring the fluidity of relatedness among transnational families (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002).

The heightened sense of avoidance acknowledged by participants of the study is problematized precisely due to the ease with which interactions can take place in contemporary times. Thus, study participants who recounted their experiences with interacting among their families in the older

technological period seldom raised the issue of avoidance, as they appreciated the constraints of the limited technology available. In practice, migrants highlighted that they selected one family member as the key focal person for the interactions. This person would then relay the information, once received, to other family members back at home. Uncle Agyenim, a participant in the study who has lived in Austria since the late 70s, sheds further light on that practice:

In those days, we could only write letters or make telephone calls on fixed phone lines and given the cost and delays associated with using those mediums, one could only relate with a limited number of relations back home, particularly when using the telephone. My elder brother lived in Tema. At the time, Tema was relatively developed, and so they had fixed telephone lines at home, so I sometimes called him and gave him information to be carried onward to our family in the village anytime he visited them (Uncle Agyenim, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2019).

The account by Uncle Agyenim above contrasts with that of Adobea below as both reflect different technological epochs. Adobea, a participant of the study in her early 30s whose husband and two other half-siblings of hers live abroad, comments on her experience of the ‘off’ pattern of relationship with her siblings:

There’s a saying that children from the father’s side are closer than children from the mother’s side, but these siblings of mine don’t communicate with me. It’s only nice that they call me. I don’t need anything from them, and so they just have to call me, but none of them calls me. I also don’t call any of them. So, we are there minding our own business (Adobea, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Adobea’s account places the blame for her ‘off’ interaction with her half-siblings on their shoulders and not on her own, as she could initiate interactions to avert her current predicament. However, there is a shared understanding among transnational families that in some cases, unsolicited interactions from family members back home usually are an attempt to engage in transnational freeloading. Given this backdrop, relations back home normally expect that if there would be any successful interactions with their migrant relations, the latter should be the ones to initiate it.

In another related account, Kyei, a participant of the study in his late 20s who maintains an ‘always on’ relationship with his migrant father but an ‘off’ one with his cousins and uncle, highlights that:

My cousins and uncle have my contact number, and therefore the expectation is that they would check on me now and then. Presently, getting in touch with families can be done through several means – chats on WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, voice calls, among others, without any stress. Thus, when they decide to limit their contact with me, I assume that they don’t consider me as a family member, and I also have to adopt the same position they have chosen (Kyei, 29<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Unlike Kyei and Adobea’s accounts which places the blame of the limited contact relationships on their relations abroad, others present a milder perspective by appreciating the fact that the expression of transnational interactions is tied to the nature of existing bonds before migration. Blessed, a participant in the study who has several relations abroad, including her father, aunt and uncles, explains the importance of prior existing bonds in shaping the nature of the transnational interactions:

Ok, when my aunt was in Ghana, you know, we were living in a compound house. When my mother went out to work, she came home late in the evening, so I spent most of my time with her because, at the time, she also had kids. They were growing, and she needed help, so I helped her with that. I would go and pick the kids from school, and when she cooks too, I helped her. She used to provide me with some food as my reward for supporting her. So basically, I spent most of the time with her because we were living in the same house, the compound house. When she travelled abroad, she would usually contact me from time to time because of the relationship I had with her. But the rest, too, they were all grown-ups. When I was growing up, they were adults, so I didn’t have any relationship with them, just that they know that this is T’s daughter, that is all (Blessed, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2019).

When Blessed’s account is interrogated vis-à-vis the accounts by Kyei and Adobea, one key insight emerges. Kyei and Adobea expect that the new technologies for communication, possessing a stronger binding force, should be activated to create a family experience through constant interactions. On the other hand, Blessed appreciates that the so-called binding force of contemporary technologies is not activated without well thought out motives on who counts as a

family member and who does not. Therefore, new technologies do not necessarily bring about perpetual intense interactions but rather become an arena of contestations and constructions, where important bonds are cemented, and others are rejected, leading to a pronounced sense of relatedness for some and distance for others. Tazanu (2015), in his study of the interactions among Cameroonian migrants and their family and friends back home, also noted the tensions surrounding the usage of the mobile phone, when migrants choose whom to contact and whom to avoid in their quest to maximise the gains of their migration projects.

Further, when a trusteeship obligation is abused, a once 'always on' interaction pattern can degenerate into an 'off' pattern. In the quotation below, Becky, in her mid-40s who lives in the USA, highlights how abuse of trusteeship responsibilities changed her interaction pattern with her uncle:

My uncle was in charge of a building I was putting up in Accra. Over time, I got to know that he was not straight with me on the cost outlay of the project. He would call me to provide me with receipts of items he bought for the construction, but when I ask my schoolmate to verify the cost of those items at the same shop my uncle bought them, his prices were about three times lower. This went on for some time until I visited home and saw things for myself. That was when I became convinced that my uncle took advantage of the building project to maximise his financial gains. Therefore, I decided to cut him off; I do not interact with him anymore as I do not find him trustworthy. I am a very tolerant person, but I never allow anyone to step on my toes twice (Becky, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019).

When Becky reveals that she has cut her uncle off, she is emphasising that their relationship has degenerated to an 'off' pattern because of her past experiences with him. Thus, even though she has his contact number, that does not translate into an interactional relationship.

One way that families in an 'off' pattern encounter each other and thereby express their transnational bond is through reaction to the posts of each other on social media platforms such as Facebook and their WhatsApp statuses. In the quotation below, Freda, a study participant in her early 20s, sheds light on how she relates with her cousins abroad.

We hardly talk to each other. However, anytime I post on my Facebook timeline, and they see it, they respond with a like button or comment on the post. I also do the same when I see their posts and updates. I also get to see snippets of their lives abroad based on the personal photos and videos they share on social media platforms. So, that is how we get along (Freda, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2019).

Freda's account above reveals how she shares an 'ambient' co-presence with her family. This form of co-presence is passive and marginal, but it nevertheless creates an awareness of the happenings in the lives of families who do not have an active and constant interactional life.

New technologies for interactions are used by transnational families to construct and deconstruct families, leading to shifty bonds and a heightened sense of avoidance. Families back home have greater expectations that their migrant relatives would activate the binding force of contemporary technologies to initiate an interaction with them. However, this expectation does not always materialise as such actions are usually sieved through past experiences and an a-prior existing bond.

## **6.5 Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter pays attention to how communication technologies, particularly the VOIP application WhatsApp, the performative act of communication and the spatial separation of families create a stable and porous 'always on but off' pattern of interactions among transnational families by blending insights from the technological determinism and social constructivism perspectives.

The technological features of WhatsApp, a multimodal smartphone-based application widely used in most countries, including Ghana, conflate the virtual and the embodied self. As social actors engage with the technological features of WhatsApp, it leads to their ability to see beyond their immediate physical environment to multiple other locations simultaneously. Here, communication

technologies determine the structure of transnational social interactions. The actors, therefore, adapt to this intrusion by constantly managing their fronts, whether in public or private spaces, as they become overwhelmed with the intrusive nature of the virtual presence of their physically absent family. These attempts at impression management are not always successful and lead to made-up truths, stumbled-upon facts and a shared awareness of the façade. Therefore, participants of the study demonstrate their ability to construct how technology influences their lives when they manage their social fronts through these various means.

These outcomes become one of the two sides to the ‘always on’ pattern. At the other end of the pole, contemporary communication technologies bring families together in closely-knitted bonds that make the transnational experience a bearable one. The extent to which these bonds are formed, to a large extent, is based on the human adaptation to the influence of contemporary technologies. The emotional outcomes of the interactions are not ephemeral but extended through material outcomes such as visits, reunions and exchange of remittances. Indeed, they embody the results of successful ‘interaction rituals’ where the outcome of the interaction is objectified (Collins, 2004). This conclusion shows that through their ‘always on’ usage pattern, transnational families can employ current communication technologies to enrich their interactional experiences.

Lastly, transnational families do not always engage the binding force of contemporary communication technologies (Vertovec, 2004) in their interactions with their families. This tendency arises particularly when they desire to curb the possibility of transnational freeloading or to reduce their contact relationships to save time and other resources needed for such encounters. They, therefore, selectively determine who becomes part of their ‘always on’ contact streams by engaging with a-prior relational bonds and past experiences of interactions. The ‘off’ pattern of relationship creates a heightened sense of avoidance and porous relational bonds resented mainly

by families in the homeland. A variant of the 'off' presence is a marginal and passive co-presence that family members adopt by responding to each other's posts on a social media platform

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARIES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 7.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this study is to present a Ghanaian perspective on the technology-mediated social interactions of transnational families. The objective is premised on the importance of sociocultural context in shaping the usage of technology and social interactions, which has not been given adequate attention in the literature. Thus, context-specific factors such as the salience of the extended family, generational influences, class, irregular migration, gendered cultural norms and rural/urban influences are considered essential factors in shaping the experiences of Ghanaian transnational families. These factors, therefore, form the basis of the three research questions of the study as follows:

- What influences one's choice of the use of particular ICT in transnational interactions?
- How do these technologies engender peculiar forms of tensions and conflicts in transnational families?
- In what ways do innovations in ICT pattern social interactions in transnational families?

In answering the three questions above, the study employs the constructivist grounded theory methodology of Kathy Charmaz (Charmaz, 2006, 2008), which privileges the co-construction of research knowledge given the multiplicity of reality, situated in a processual context. In view of this, the researcher's positionality is considered necessary in shaping the whole research process. Data for the study was gathered primarily from Accra and Nkoranza in Ghana and validated with

insights from some Ghanaians in Vienna, Austria, and Düsseldorf, Germany. Participants for the study were selected through snowballing, purposive and theoretical sampling.

Overall, sixty-one participants were interviewed across the study areas. Six Ghana-based participants were matched with their migrant relations in diverse locations in Canada, the United States of America, Austria, China and Germany. The sample further comprised twenty spouses, twenty adult children aged eighteen years and above, eleven parents, ten siblings and other extended relations. Despite the delineation among the study participants, many of them had had multiple and varied transnational experiences throughout their lives. For example, some participants were wives of migrant husbands who died while abroad and are now mothers of migrant children. Other participants were left-behind children whose parents were abroad and are now in transnational unions with their migrant husbands.

The data gathering methods included in-depth and key informant interviews, non-participant observations and a review of secondary data sources such as video files on Facebook, YouTube and a designated television programme that focuses on Ghanaian transnational families. All the interviews were conducted face to face except for the six members of the matched samples who lived abroad, whose interviews were conducted through calls on WhatsApp. The data were analysed using the thematic network analysis framework of Attride-Stirling (2001), which proposes organising the themes from the data along three succeeding networks based on the degree of relationships.

The study draws insights from multiple perspectives to make sense of the results garnered through the network analysis. First, the transnational perspective situates social life and experiences in the 'transnational social field' rather than the nation-state (Glick Schiller et al., 1992b; Glick Schiller

et al., 1995; Levitt, 2001b). Therefore, the transnational optic focuses on dense enduring networks of relationships and exchanges that criss-cross the boundaries of multiple nation-states. The relationships and exchanges both transcend any particular nation-state but are also shaped by it. The relationships and exchanges are further situated in patterns of power and inequality which are transformed and sometimes reconstituted by the transnational experiences. A second perspective is advanced by Morgan (1996), who proposes that family studies should focus on the practices constructed to constitute families rather than on broad-based patterns. Thus, for transnational families, practices such as routine phone calls, exchange of material and non-material care, and occasional visits are essential parts of how family life is practised. As communication technologies mediate social interactions, I also draw on two seemingly contrasting perspectives. The technological determinism of Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 1962; McLuhan, 1994/1964) and the social construction of technology (SCOT) of Wiebe E. Bijker and Trevor J. Pinch (Bijker, 1995; Bijker & Pinch, 1987). A synthesis of these two perspectives highlights how contemporary technologies extend the self to multiple other locations through the multi-modal means of interactions. At the same time, different user groups of the technologies define and adapt their uses to promote their common interests. The SCOT approach further throws light on how communication technologies have over the years been made user-friendly, especially when compared to those of the past.

Given this background, this chapter presents the summaries of the study's main findings by highlighting how they address the specific research questions outlined. The summaries also demonstrate how the various insights drawn from multiple disciplines are integrated to bring coherence to the findings. The chapter also presents conclusions and recommendations based on the significant findings.

## 7.2 Summaries of Major Findings

Transnational families construct their usage of communication technologies through their care practices. The study identified three critical care practices as emotional care, trusteeship obligations, and material care. The care practices of relations with affective bonds performed with contemporary communication technologies produce a 'high-end techno-bond' that privileges voice-based mediums due to the immediacy effect and the closeness it engenders. A marked feature of interactions among 'high-end techno bond' users is its heightened nature, which is made effective by cheap internet-based phone calls and asynchronous mediums such as chats, short messaging services and voice notes. These mediums are used to stretch the interactions throughout the day among relations as they share minute by minute details of their lives. The vibrancy of the interactions is given a further boost when video calls are introduced once the macro-level infrastructural provisioning enables it. The urban bias in the provisioning of ICT infrastructure makes video calls predominant in densely populated urban areas of Accra, while sparsely populated rural areas like Nkoranza and peri-urban areas of Accra like Amasaman have a poor network. Through the usage of video calls, these transnational families can encounter not only the virtual presence of their families abroad but their physical environment to the extent that it increases their emotional arousal and consequently deepens their concern for each other.

High-end techno-bonds can exist between any category of kin as emotional attachments are established through pre-existing relationships before one's migration project and the transformations those relationships may go through over time. One's legal status is also essential to some extent in the generation of the high-end techno-bonds. Generally, the desire for emotional support increases during periods of crisis such as divorce, illness, or unemployment. Irregular migrants, given their high propensity to a crisis because of their precarious living conditions

(Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Tanle, 2012), interact more often with their relations back home for emotional and other forms of support (Mazzucato, 2009).

On the other hand, when care is performed through trusteeship obligations over contemporary communication technologies, it produces a 'low-end techno-bond' as the nature of the interaction is usually thin and focused on a third party or a transaction such as the construction of a residential building. The most preferred medium here is also the voice call because of the immediacy effect. Other socio-cultural determinants such as the social context of the information, the cultural preference for oral communication, undergirded by the high prevalence of illiteracy, adds more weight to the preference for voice calls. The 'low-end techno-bond' users, much like the 'high-end techno-bond' users, also use text-based mediums to arrange for a more convenient time to make voice calls. However, they demonstrate an additional preference for text-based mediums such as emails when larger volumes of text are exchanged and also when they desire more secure platforms. Their usage of video calls also provides proof of transactions in their bid to minimise abuse of trust.

Interactions that produce the low-end techno-bond can also exist between any particular group of kin. However, given that these relationships are activity centred, the capacity to perform the required activity is vital in determining how the relationships are formed. One's legal status is not tied to the formation of the low-end techno-bond as both regular and irregular migrants rely on their relations back home for various kinds of support services, a phenomenon which Mazzucato (2009) terms as 'reverse remittance'. Further, the scope of activities that generates the low-end techno-bond are broad and may evolve throughout one's migration project. For example, as Mazzucato (2009) highlights, early phase migrants rely primarily on their relations abroad as they deal with settling down in their new destinations. Also, migrants who leave younger children in

the custody of other relations keep close interactions with those relations irrespective of the phase of their migration project (Dankyi, 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2015). Further, as migrants accumulate more resources abroad, they invest in residential properties (Pellow, 2003; Smith & Mazzucato, 2009) and other income-generating businesses, all of which become occasions for sustained interactions with their relations back home.

The provisioning of emotional care and trusteeship obligations is enabled mainly by material care that manifests in the exchange of various remittances in the transnational space. Although not an ICT medium, human couriers play a vital role in the exchange of material care. Communication technologies were limited in the older technological epoch. Thus information regarding material goods sent through a courier was selectively directed to a focal person through a telephone call. Presently, however, when human couriers are used, a continuous flow of voice, video and text-based information is shared among the sender, the courier and the various nodes of receivers. These technologies have transformed how human couriers currently operate in the transnational space. One of the critical transformations is the minimisation of trust and mutual obligation as the basis for the service.

Further, one's position in the transnational space, whether as a migrant or non-migrant, determines which technologies are used to transfer cash and non-cash remittances. Migrants gain access to more resources that put them in a position to influence some outcomes in their families, such as decisions on which formal or informal channels to use when sending remittances. Furthermore, among the migrants, one's legal status also influences their decision on which of the available formal and informal channels to use. Irregular migrants maintain a low public presence due to their fear of arrest and deportation. Therefore, they are more likely to use informal channels such as

human couriers and ‘swap mobile money’, whereas regular migrants have both channels open to their users without any restraint.

As transnational families choose one or another communication medium to interact, tensions and conflicts arise. However, the tensions and conflicts are intertwined with the usage of the technologies for communication, which also demonstrate positive outcomes. Some of such positive outcomes include building affective bonds given the frequent interactions occasioned by the reduced cost of telecommunication services.

Tensions and conflicts in transnational families are patterned by the kinship bond and the period of the interaction. In the older technological era, the ability to communicate was inhibited by cost, limited means and poor infrastructure. The means available were snail-paced mail delivery systems where families exchanged letters and audio cassettes in an institutional setting with rigidities that hampered the provisioning of postage and later telephone services. These rigidities resulted in: expensive calls, whether at a communication centre or a payphone booth; loss of privacy as the interactions took place in public spaces such as a neighbour’s house; and delays as many people compete for the use of the limited resources avenues for communication. These ultimately resulted in the sparsity of communication and high financial toll, particularly for relations abroad. Therefore, very few relations could interact, leading to frequent accusations of neglect or avoidance when migrants visited home.

The sparsity of interactions was experienced among all the categories of kin as the constraints emanated from the macro level. However, regular migrants and their relations in Accra were better off than irregular migrants and their relations in Nkoranza in terms of access to the limited services and infrastructure. Irregular migrants who mainly used the northern route to Libya had more

difficulty interacting with their relations en-route and in the early phases of settling in their destinations.

The contemporary technological era, in contrast, presents substantially reduced costs of interactions due to factors such as the development of new technologies and the liberalisation of the telecommunication sector. Given all these innovations, relations can communicate in a multi-modal environment and exchange audio, voice, video, and text-based content in an internet-based application such as WhatsApp and Facebook. Migrants and their relations back home can communicate more intensely and frequently in a multi-sensory environment. These developments have also brought new forms of challenges such as gendered surveillance and transnational freeloaders. Surveillance practices are patterned by the kinship bond and are not influenced by one's migration status.

Parents often follow their migrant children on social media. They also position themselves to be constantly available to receive phone calls from their children. They are also open to third parties' reports of their children's (mis)conduct, especially when parents migrate and leave children behind. They do all these to ensure their children become rooted in the Ghanaian society through practices such as marriage to a Ghanaian, investment in buildings and other income-generating projects. Therefore, their usage of contemporary communication technology promotes desirable values in their children, whether at home or abroad. The intensity of the surveillance sometimes causes resentment in children when they feel parents intrude too much into their affairs.

The gaze of the community that crisscrosses the transnational space through surveillance reports sent by third parties at both ends represents a culturally embedded response to ensure that the conduct of couples is socially acceptable. Among couples, surveillance is used to ensure the

exclusivity of sexual rights. However, the expectation of exclusive sexual rights is challenged by the gendered traditional cultural norm of polygyny, prolonged separation of couples leading to unmet sexual desires and social pressures, particularly on men to engage in extramarital affairs. Consequently, the community gaze focuses more on non-migrant wives than on non-migrant husbands. The transnational couples who fallout of the expectation on exclusive sexual rights encounter disruptions such as divorce and marital strife, which is sometimes normalised through mediation.

Further, siblings and extended relations use surveillance to ensure that the interest of relations abroad, such as oversight responsibilities for buildings and business projects and care for children at home, are guaranteed. Here, the surveillance practices are undergirded by the wanton misappropriation of resources migrants send home to pursue various ends. Relations in this category also capitalise on the ease of reaching each other to prospect for free-loading opportunities, leading to what I term 'transnational freeloadng'. The practice is premised on the socio-cultural norm of reciprocity that informs some exchanges among kin and non-kin relations. However, its parasitic nature makes it unbalanced reciprocity, but those who engage in transnational freeloadng make implicit or explicit reference to the norm as the basis for their actions. The prevalence of transnational freeloadng also highlights the economic dimensions of migration, even though not all migration projects become economically viable. Thus, non-migrant relations feel that their migrant relations have a higher economic privilege than them. When relations are found culpable of misguided conduct, disruptive tendencies such as selective avoidance and resentment arises.

Two main patterns emerge out of transnational interactions with contemporary communication technologies. These patterns result from the ability of transnational relations to (re)-negotiate the

boundaries of their relationships throughout their interactional lives. The patterns point to how communication technologies - particularly the VOIP application WhatsApp, the performative act of communication and the spatial separation of families create a stable and a porous ‘...always on but off...’ interactions among transnational families.

First, the technological features of WhatsApp, a multi-modal smartphone-based application widely used in several countries, including Ghana, conflates the virtual and the embodied self. Here, communication technologies determine the structure of transnational social interactions through the multi-modal contact of video, voice, text, location sharing and other additional features. As social actors engage with the technological features of WhatsApp, it leads to their ability to see beyond their immediate physical environment to multiple locations simultaneously. Relations, therefore, adapt to the intrusion enabled by technology by constantly manage their fronts, whether in public or private spaces, as they become overwhelmed with the virtual presence of their physically absent family. These attempts at impression management are not always successful and thus lead to made-up truths, stumbled upon facts and a shared awareness of the façade. Participants of the study demonstrate their ability to construct how technology influences their lives when they manage their social fronts through these various means.

Additionally, contemporary communication technologies bring families together in closely knitted bonds that make the transnational experience a bearable one. The emotional outcomes of the interactions are not ephemeral but extended through material outcomes such as visits, reunions and exchange of remittances. Indeed, they embody the results of successful ‘interaction rituals’ where the outcome of the interaction is objectified (Collins, 2004). These outcomes become the ‘always on’ pattern, distinguished from the ‘...off’ pattern. Through their ‘always on’ usage,

transnational families show that they can employ current communication technologies to enrich their interactional experiences.

Second, transnational families do not always engage the binding force of contemporary communication technologies (Vertovec, 2004) in their interactions with their families. This position occurs particularly when they desire to curb the possibility of transnational freeloading or reduce their contact relationships to save time and other resources needed for such encounters. They, therefore, selectively determine who becomes part of their ‘always on’ contact streams by engaging with a-prior relational bonds and past experiences with interactions. The ‘...off’ pattern that emerges creates a heightened sense of avoidance and porous relational bonds that families in the homeland mostly resent. A variant of the ‘...off’ pattern is a marginal and passive co-presence that family members adopt by responding to each other’s posts on social media platforms without any meaningful interactions.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

The usage of technologies for social interactions produces a two-sided experience for families, much like the outcomes of the modernity project (Alexander, 2013). On the one hand, communication technologies enable the building of connecting bridges between migrants and their relations back home (Levitt, 2001b; Vertovec, 2004). These bridges offer opportunities for heightened interactions which enable families to maintain effective affective bonds (Baldassar, 2007b, 2008, 2016), which produces both material and non-material outcomes such as remittances and emotional stability, respectively. On the other hand, the bridges also produce tensions and conflicts, which are strong enough to break the kinship bond (Hannaford, 2015; Silva, 2018;

Tazanu, 2015). The depth of the bridging has become more pronounced in the contemporary era as interactions have become commonplace. This conclusion is not new in the literature on ICT mediated interactions among transnational families.

However, the new dimensions this study adds to the literature based on the specific focus on some Ghanaian transnational families are emphasised. First, how transnational surveillance occurs among couples, parents versus children, and extended relations, show a greater predisposition towards community surveillance than privately based surveillance, as Hannaford (2015) emphasised in her study of Senegalese transnational couples. This conclusion is accounted for by the limited penetration of landlines in Ghana (Haggarty et al., 2003) and the socio-cultural value that encourages women/wives to work outside the home (Clark, 1994, 1999; Darkwah, 2007). Thus, whereas in the Senegalese case, husbands validated the location of their wives by calling their landlines at home and through other personally initiated actions of the husbands, such practices can hardly be done in Ghana as only a few homes own landlines. Moreover, unlike the Senegalese case, where married women are traditionally expected to be immobile and thus home-bound, as Hannaford (ibid) emphasises, married women in Ghana are traditionally expected to work outside the home. Therefore, their public presence amplifies the gaze and control of their lives beyond that of their husbands to other community members who are sometimes motivated to send solicited and unsolicited surveillance reports to migrant husbands abroad.

A second contribution is how the culture of indirection (Elul, 2019; Obeng, 2003; Yankah, 1995) undergirds formal and informal communication influences how communication technology is used. The culture of indirection affects how transnational freeloading takes place and how the intrusion brought about by the heightened use of contemporary communication technologies is managed. Thus, relations in Ghana, who may not be legitimate dependents, under the pretext of

sharing trending funny videos, present subtle ways to make demands from their relations abroad. This insight, therefore, extends the current literature that establishes the heightened dependency burdens that the usage of new technologies bring to migrants (Benítez, 2012; Horst & Miller, 2006; Mahler, 2001) by showing in explicit ways how the socio-cultural context shapes how the dependency is negotiated with ICT. Also, the intrusive nature of contemporary communication technologies is controlled to some extent by the culture of indirection, which determines the parts of the lives of transnational families that is made bare and that which is not, highlighting the social shaping of technologies (Bijker, 1995; Bijker & Pinch, 1987).

Thirdly, the study brings to the fore some common-threaded patterns that guide some of the interactions of specific kin groups. When parents interact with their migrant children, they usually are concerned that their children continue to keep their Ghanaian roots despite their transnational experiences. They do this through many ways, some of which include: encouraging their children to migrate when they are matured; constantly availing themselves to interact with them to influence them to, among others, marry a Ghanaian, build a house, help another member of the family to migrate, invest in an income-generating business in Ghana, and maintain some of their deep-rooted Ghanaian cultural identities.

Couples also share a common concern that their partners maintain their fidelity to the marriage vows. This concern, therefore, informs some of their surveillance practices. However, this concern is fraught because of the growing incidence of ‘private polygyny’ (Karanja, 1994) and unmet sexual desires due to the long separation. Partners of irregular migrants who rarely visit home bear the greatest brunt of the long separation and therefore put such unions on the brink of collapse, despite the ability to constantly remain connected virtually.

When siblings and other extended relations interact, their concern is to ensure the fulfilment of various kinds of trusteeship obligations such as the care for children left behind, oversight responsibilities on business ventures and residential building projects. The norm of reciprocity informs these obligations that undergird familial exchanges. However, the norm is informally structured and therefore, the ability to enforce it is sometimes challenged. In order to avert abuses of the reciprocal exchange norm, families engage in surveillance activities with the use of contemporary communication technologies. The surveillance discoveries sometimes bring about the breakdown of some kinship bonds and the firming of others, thus pointing to the fluid ways in which kinship relationships are structured (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002; Morgan, 1996).

Lastly, beyond the contributions informed by the Ghanaian context, the study also contributes some new concepts in the lexicon of ICT mediated transnational family studies. These concepts are ‘transnational freeloading’, ‘community surveillance’, ‘high-end techno-bond’ and ‘low-end techno-bond’. These concepts express the various ways transnational families use ICTs in different circumstances to achieve varied ends.

#### **7.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made to influence further research and also to shape the future of Ghanaian transnational families:

- I recommend that more studies on ICT mediated transnational family interactions should be undertaken concerning other salient Ghanaian contextual factors such as patrilineal and elitist families to enrich the literature;

- Given the Janus-faced nature of transnational interactions, relevant stakeholders – communities, families and particular categories of kin should continually dialogue among themselves to determine appropriate ways to minimise the undesirable while promoting the desirable outcomes of their interactions;
- Families of migrants should appreciate the fact that their spatially differentiated environment may shape their socio-cultural outlook and should therefore be more open and tolerant to such outcomes in addition to what those families expect or desire from them.
- Lastly, communication technologies shape social relations at the same time that social actors adapt to their use. Therefore, users of technologies should be empowered to understand how technologies affect their everyday lives even as they adapt to their various uses.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aboderin, I. (2004). Decline in Material Family Support for Older People in Urban Ghana, Africa: Understanding Processes and Causes of Change. *Journal of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES*, 59B(3), S128–S137.
- Abrego, L. (2009). Economic well-being in Salvadoran transnational families: How gender affects remittance practices. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71, 1070 – 1085.
- Adepoju, A. (2009). Introduction: Rethinking the dynamics of migration within, from and to Africa In A. Adepoju (Ed.), *International migration within, to and from Africa in a globalized world* (pp. 9-45). Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers
- Adiku, A. G. (2017). Negotiating Transnational Intimacy: A Study of Ghanaian Couples. *Ghana Social Science Journal*, 14(1), 161-192.
- Adiku, G. A. (2018). *The remittance debate reconsidered : interrogating transnational transfers between Ghanaian migrants in the United Kingdom and their relatives in Ghana*. (PhD Thesis), University of Oxford, Oxford.
- Adomako Ampofo, A. (2007). “My Cocoa is between my Legs”: Sex as Work Among Ghanaian Women. In S. Harley (Ed.), *Women's Labor in the Global Economy: Speaking in Multiple Voices* (pp. 182-205). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Alexander, C. J. (2013). *The Dark Side of Modernity* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Alinejad, D. (2019). Careful Co-presence: The Transnational Mediation of Emotional Intimacy. *Social Media + Society*(April-June), 1 –11. doi:10.1177/2056305119854222
- Anane-Agyei, N. A.-K. (2012). *Ghana's Brong-Ahafo region: Story of an African society in the heart of the world*. Legon, Accra: Abibrem Communications.
- Anarfi, J., & Ababio, O.-M. E. (2018). Historical perspective of migration from and to Ghana. In M. Awumbila, D. Badasu, & J. Teye (Eds.), *Migration in a globalizing world: Perspectives from Ghana*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Anderson, B. (2017). Towards a New Politics of Migration? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(9), 1527-1537. doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1300297
- Anderson, B., & Blinder, S. (2015). *Who Counts as a Migrant? Definitions and their Consequences*. Retrieved from The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford: www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk
- Anibrika, B. S. K., & Gavua, E. K. (2017). MTN 4th Generation Long Terminal Evolution (4Lte), a New Technological Paradigm for Ghana's Economy. *International Journal of Engineering Trends and Technology (IJETT)*, 54(2), 64-74. doi:10.14445/22315381/IJETT-V54P211
- Apatinga, G. A., Kyeremeh, E. K., & Arku, G. (2020). ‘Feminization of migration’: The implications for ‘left-behind’ families in Ghana. *Migration and Development*. doi:10.1080/21632324.2019.1703283
- Arango, J. (2004). Theories of international migration. In D. Joly (Ed.), *International migration and the new millennium* (pp. 15-36). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Ardayfio-Schandorf, E. (2007). The family in Ghana: Past and present perspectives. In Y. Oheneba-Sakyi & B. K. Takyi (Eds.), *African families at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (pp. 129-152). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Aryeetey, E., Alhassan, R., Asuming-Brempong, S., & Twerefou, D. (2007). *The organisation of land markets and production in Ghana* Accra: ISSER.

- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. (2005). *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV.
- Asante, K. B. R. (2014). *Domestication of the Mobile Phone Amongst Kantamanto Used-Clothes Traders in Accra*. (PhD Sociology Thesis), University of Ghana, Legon.
- Asima, P. P. D. (2018). Transnational fosterage: The experiences of the second generation sent back home to Ghana by Ghanaian migrant parents in London. In M. Awumbila, D. Badasu, & J. Teye (Eds.), *Migration in a globalizing world: Perspectives from Ghana*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Asis, M. M. B. (2008). The Philippines. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 17(3–4), 349–378.
- Assimeng, M. (1997). *Foundations of African social thought*. Accra: Ghana University Press.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001). Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1(3), 385-405.
- Awumbila, M., Teye, K. J., Litchfield, J., Boakye-Yiadom, L., Deshingkar, P., & Quartey, P. (2015). *Are Migrant Households better off than Non-Migrant Households? Evidence from Ghana* (28). Retrieved from Migrating Out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/64691>
- Baber, Z. (1991). Beyond the Structure/Agency Dualism: An Evaluation of Giddens' Theory of Structuration. *Sociological Inquiry*, 61(2), 219-230. doi:10.1111/j.1475-682X.1991.tb00276.x
- Bacchi, C. (2009). *Analysing Policy: What Is the Problem Represented to Be?* Oxford: Pearson.
- Baldassar, L. (2007a). Transnational Families and Aged Care: The Mobility of Care and the Migrancy of Ageing. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(2), 275-297. doi:10.1080/13691830601154252
- Baldassar, L. (2007b). Transnational families and the provision of moral and emotional support: The relationship between truth and distance. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 14(4), 385-409. doi:10.1080/10702890701578423
- Baldassar, L. (2008). Missing kin and longing to be together: Emotions and the construction of co-presence in transnational relationships. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 29(3), 247-266. doi:10.1080/07256860802169196
- Baldassar, L. (2016). De-demonizing distance in mobile family lives: co-presence, care circulation and polymedia as vibrant matter. *Global Networks*, 16(2), 145-163.
- Baldassar, L., Baldock, C. V., & Wilding, R. (2007). *Families caring across borders: Migration, ageing and transnational caregiving*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Barkan, E. R. (2006). Immigration, incorporation, assimilation, and the limits of transnationalism: Introduction. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 25(2/3), 7-32. doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/27501686
- Battistella, G. (2012). Multi-level policy approach in the governance of labour migration: Considerations from the Philippine experience. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 40(4), 419-446. doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/43500551
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk society: Towards a new modernity* London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Cambridge Polity Press.
- Ben-Ze'ev, A. (2004). *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Benítez, L. J. (2012). Salvadoran Transnational Families: ICT and Communication Practices in the Network Society. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 38(9), 1439-1449. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2012.698214>
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: a political ecology of things* Durham: Duke University Press.
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- Bijker, W. E. (1995). *Of bicycles, bakelites, and bulbs: Toward a theory of sociotechnical change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bijker, W. E., & Pinch, T. (1987). The social construction of facts and artifacts: Or how the sociology of science and the sociology of technology might benefit each other. In W. E. Bijker, T. P. Hughes, & T. Pinch (Eds.), *The social construction of technological systems: New directions in the sociology and history of technology* (pp. 17-50). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Bimber, B. (1994). Three faces of technological determinism. In M. R. Smith & L. Marx (Eds.), *Does technology drive history? The dilemma of technological determinism* (pp. 79-100). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2015). *Grounded theory a practical guide*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Boahen, A. A. (1975). *Ghana: Evolution and change in the nineteenth and twentieth century*. London: Longman.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 241-258). New York: Greenwood.
- Boyd, M., & Nowak, J. (2012). Social networks and international migration In M. Martiniello & J. Rath (Eds.), *An introduction to international migration studies* (pp. 77-103). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Bray, F. (2008). Constructing Intimacy: Technology, Family and Gender in East Asia. *East Asian Science, Technology and Society: an International Journal*, 2(2), 151-165. doi:10.1215/s12280-008-9051-8
- Bryant, A., & Charmaz, K. (2011). Grounded theory in historical perspective: An epistemological account. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of grounded theory* (pp. 31-57). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bryceson, F. D., & Vuorela, U. (2002). Transnational Families in the 21st Century. In F. D. Bryceson & U. Vuorela (Eds.), *The Transnational Family: New European Frontiers and Global Networks* (pp. 3-30). Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Caarls, K., & Mazzucato, V. (2016). Transnational Relationships and Reunification: Ghanaian Couples between Ghana and Europe. *Demographic Research*, 34(21), 587-614. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2016.34.21
- Carey, J. W. (1967). Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan. *The Antioch Review*, 27(1), 5-39. doi:<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4610816>
- Carrier, J. (1990). Reconciling commodities and personal relations in industrial society. *Theory and Society*, 19(5), 579-598.
- Castells, M., Fernández-Ardèvol, M., Qiu, L. J., & Sey, A. (2007). *Mobile communication and society: a global perspective*. Cambridge: MIT Press,.

- Castles, S., Cubas, M. A., Kim, C., & Ozkul, D. (2012). Irregular migration: Causes, patterns, and strategies. In I. Omelaniuk (Ed.), *Global perspectives on migration and development. Global Migration Issues* (Vol. 1, pp. 117-151). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Castles, S., & Miller, J. (2009). *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cebotari, V., Appiah, E., & Mazzucato, V. (2018). A Longitudinal Analysis of Well-Being of Ghanaian Children in Transnational Families. *Child Development*, 89( 5), 1768–1785. doi:10.1111/cdev.12879
- Chambers, D. (2001). *Representing the family*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Chant, S. (1998). Households, gender and rural-urban migration: reflections on linkages and considerations for policy. *Environment and Urbanization*, 10(1), 5-21.
- Chant, S., & Radcliffe, S. (1992). Migration and development: The importance of gender In S. Chant (Ed.), *Gender and migration in developing countries* (pp. 1-29). London: Belhaven Press.
- Charles, N., Davies, A. C., & Harris, C. (2008). *Families in Transition: Social change, family formation and kin relationships*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21st century: Applications for advancing social justice studies. In K. N. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 507-535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: Practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage Publications Inc.
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Constructionism and the grounded theory. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of constructionist research* (pp. 397-412). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Cheal, D. (2008). *Families in today's world: A comparative approach*. London: Routledge.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2004). The deinstitutionalization of American marriage. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66(4), 848–861. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00058.x
- Chernilo, D. (2006). Social theory's methodological nationalism myth and reality. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(1), 5–22. doi:10.1177/1368431006060460
- Chong, A. (2018). Migration, jobs, and real exchange rates in the Philippines. *Journal of Economic Integration*, 33(3), 514-537. doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26484510
- Christians, C. G. (2005). Ethics and politics in qualitative research. In K. N. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 139-164). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Church, K., & de Oliveira, R. (2013). What's up with WhatsApp? Comparing Mobile Instant Messaging Behaviors with Traditional SMS. *MOBILE HCI 2013 – COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION*, 352-361.
- Clark, G. (1994). *Onions are my husband: Survival and accumulation by West African market women* Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Clark, G. (1999). Mothering, Work, and Gender in Urban Asante Ideology and Practice. *American Anthropologist*, 101(4), 717-729.
- Coe, C. (2011). What is the Impact of Transnational Migration on Family Life? Women's Comparisons of Internal and International Migration in a Small Town in Ghana. *American Ethnologist*, 38(1), 148-163. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01298.x

- Coe, C. (2017). Transnational Migration and the Commodification of Eldercare in Urban Ghana. *Identities*, 24(5), 542-556. doi:10.1080/1070289x.2017.1346510
- Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design - Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cusack, K. (2009). "Our house": Ghana's architecture for gender based violence In K. Cusack & T. Manuh (Eds.), *The architecture of violence against women in Ghana* (pp. 1-34). Accra: Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre.
- Dankyi, E. K. (2011). Growing Up in a Transnational Household: A Study of Children of International Migrants in Accra, Ghana *Ghana Studies*, 14 133-161. doi:10.1353/ghs.2011.0004
- Darkwah, A. K. (2007). Work as a duty and as a joy: Understanding the role of work in the lives of Ghanaian female traders of global consumer items. In S. Harley (Ed.), *Women's labor in the global economy: Speaking in multiple voices* (pp. 206-220). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Darkwah, A. K., & Adomako Ampofo, A. (2008). Race, Gender and Global Love: Non-Ghanaian Wives, Insiders or Outsiders in Ghana? *International Journal of Sociology of the Family, Intersectional Analyses of Family for the 21st Century*, 34(2), 187-208.
- Darkwah, A. K., Awumbila, M., & Teye, J. K. (2016). *Of Local Places and Local People: Understanding Migration in Peripheral Capitalist Outposts*. Retrieved from Migrating out of Poverty Research Consortium <http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org/files/file.php?name=wp43-darkwah-et-al-2016-of-local-places-and-local-people.pdf&site=354>
- Darkwah, A. K., Thorsen, D., Boateng, D. A., & Teye, J. K. (2019). *Good for parents but bad for wives: Migration as a contested model of success in contemporary Ghana*. Retrieved from University of Sussex, School of Global Studies: <http://www.migratingoutofpoverty.org/files/file.php?name=wp61-darkwah-et-al-2019-good-for-parents-but-bad-for-wives.pdf&site=354>
- Denzin, K. N., & Lincoln, S. Y. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In K. N. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-32). SAGE Publications Inc.: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Diko, J., & Tipple, A. G. (1992). Migrants build at home: Long distance housing development by Ghanaians in London. *Cities*, 9(4), 288-294.
- Durkheim, E. (1984). *The Division of Labor in Society with introduction by Lewis A. Coser* (W. D. Halls, Trans.). London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Elabor-Idemudia, P. (2015). Transnationalism and remittances: The double-edged position of transmigrant women engaged in the domestic service sector. In G. Man & R. Cohen (Eds.), *Engendering transnational voices: studies in family, work, and identity* (pp. 117-134). Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press Waterloo.
- Elul, E. B. (2019). *Privacy in urban Ghana: an ethnographic exploration of nightlife, housing, and social media*. (PhD Thesis), Tel Aviv University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

- Essamuah, M., & Tonah, S. (2004). Coping with urban poverty in Ghana: An analysis of household and individual livelihood strategies in Nima/Accra. *Legon Journal of Sociology*, 1 (2), 79-96.
- Faist, T. (2004). Towards a Political Sociology of Transnationalization. The State of the Art in Migration Research. *European Journal of Sociology*, 45(3), 331-366. doi:10.1017/s0003975604001481
- Finch, J. (2007). Displaying Families. *Sociology*, 41(1), 65–81. doi:10.1177/0038038507072284
- Fresnoza-Flot, A. (2009). Migration status and transnational mothering: the case of Filipino migrants in France. *Global Networks*, 9(2), 252–270.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The feminine mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc.
- Gergen, K. J. (2004). The challenge of absent presence. In J. E. Katz & M. A. Aakhus (Eds.), *Perpetual contact: Mobile communication, private talk, public performance* (pp. 227-241). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1990). *The consequences of modernity*. Stanford, CA Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (2011). *Runaway world: How globalisation is reshaping our lives*. London: Profile Books.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine.
- Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (1992a). Transnationalism: A new analytic framework for understanding migration. In N. Glick Schiller, L. Basch, & C. Blanc-Szanton (Eds.), *Towards a transnational perspective on migration: Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy.
- Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc-Szanton, C. (Eds.). (1992b). *Towards a transnational perspective on migration: Race, class, ethnicity, and nationalism reconsidered*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
- Glick Schiller, N., Basch, L., & Blanc, C. S. (1995). From immigrant to transmigrant: Theorizing transnational migration. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 68(1), 48-63.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor.
- Grant, R. (2009). *Globalizing city: The urban and economic transformation of Accra, Ghana*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- GSS. (2014). *Migration in Ghana*. Retrieved from Ghana Statistical Service: <http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/Migration%20in%20Ghana.pdf>
- GSS. (2019). *Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) 7*. Retrieved from Ghana Statistical Service: [http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/GLSS7%20MAIN%20REPORT\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh/gssmain/fileUpload/pressrelease/GLSS7%20MAIN%20REPORT_FINAL.pdf)
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, S. Y. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research: Theories and issues. In K. N. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). London: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, S. Y. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluence. In K. N. Denzin & S. Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 191-215). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.

- Haddon, L. (2004). *Information and communication technologies in everyday life: A concise introduction and research guide*. Oxford: Berg.
- Haggarty, L., Shirley, M. M., & Wallsten, S. (2003). *Telecommunication Reform in Ghana*. Retrieved from The World Bank Group: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/455771468774879102/pdf/multi0page.pdf>
- Hannaford, D. (2015). Technologies of the spouse: intimate surveillance in Senegalese transnational marriages. *Global Networks*, 15(1), 43–59.
- Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Toronto: Signal McClelland & Stewart.
- Hatton, T. J., & Williamson, J. G. (1998). *The age of mass migration: Causes and economic impact*. New York Oxford University Press.
- Haynes, J., Aryeetey, E., Harrigan, J., & Nissanke, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Economic Reforms in Ghana: The Miracle and the Mirage* (Vol. 72).
- Heaton, T. B., & Darkwah, A. (2011). Religious Differences in Modernization of the Family. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(12), 1576-1596. doi:10.1177/0192513x11398951
- Hess, J. B. (2000). Imagining architecture: The structure of nationalism in Accra, Ghana. *Africa Today*, 47(2), 35-58.
- Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2003). *The second shift* New York: Penguin Books.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (1994). *Gendered Transitions: Mexican Experiences of Immigration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., & Avila, E. (2003). “I’m here, but I’m there”: The meanings of Latina transnational motherhood. In P. Hondagneu-Sotelo (Ed.), *Gender and U.S. immigration contemporary trends* (pp. 317-340). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Honwana, M. A. (2012). *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa*. Sterling, Va.: Kumarian Press Publications.
- Horst, A. H. (2006). The Blessings and Burdens of Communication: Cell Phones in Jamaican Transnational Social Fields. *Global Networks*, 6(2), 143-159.
- Horst, A. H., & Miller, D. (2006). *The cell phone: an anthropology of communication*. New York: Berg.
- Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the romantic utopia: Love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- IOM. (2010). *World Migration Report 2010 - The future of migration: Building capacities for change*. Retrieved from International Organization for Migration: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2010-future-migration-building-capacities-change>
- IOM. (2019). *World migration report 2020*. Retrieved from International Organization for Migration: <https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2020>
- Isiugo-Abanihe, U. C. (1985). Child Fosterage in West Africa. *Population and Development Review*, Vol. , No. (Mar., ), pp., 11(1), 53-73.
- Johnson, J. M., & Rowlands, T. (2012). The interpersonal dynamics of in-depth interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of interview research: The complexity of the craft* (pp. 99-113). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Kabki, M., Mazzucato, V., & Appiah, E. (2004). 'Wo benane eye bebre': The economic impact of remittance of Netherlands-based Ghanaian migrants on rural Ashanti. *POPULATION, SPACE AND PLACE*, 10(2), 85-97.

- Karanja, W. W. (1994). The phenomenon of "outside wives": Some reflections on its possible influence on fertility. In C. Bledsoe & G. Pison (Eds.), *Nuptiality in sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary anthropological and demographic perspectives* (pp. 194-214). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Karlsson, M., & Cruz, G. (2018). *Rural connectivity innovation case study: Using light sites to drive rural coverage - Huawei RuralStar and MTN Ghana*. Retrieved from London: [https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Huawei\\_RuralStar\\_MTN\\_Ghana\\_Rural\\_Innovation\\_Connectivity\\_Case\\_Study\\_Nov18.pdf](https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Huawei_RuralStar_MTN_Ghana_Rural_Innovation_Connectivity_Case_Study_Nov18.pdf)
- Keller, R., & Charmaz, K. (2016). A Personal Journey with Grounded Theory Methodology. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(1), Art. 16. doi:<http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1601165>
- King, R. (2012) Theories and typologies of migration: An overview and a primer. In. *Willy Brandt series of working papers in international migration and ethnic relations 3/12* (pp. 3-43). Malmö: Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM).
- Klein, H. K., & Kleinman, D. L. (2002). The social construction of technology: Structural considerations. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 27(1), 28-52.
- Kleist, N. (2017). Disrupted migration projects: the moral economy of involuntary return to Ghana from Libya. *Africa*, 87(2), 322–342. doi:doi:10.1017/S000197201600098X
- Kok, P. (1999). The Definition of Migration and Its Application: Making Sense of Recent South African Census and Survey Data. *SA Journal of Demography*, 7(1), 19-30.
- Konadu-Agyemang, K. (2001). A survey of housing conditions and characteristics in Accra, an African city. *Habitat International*, 25, 15-34.
- Kuhn, T. S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lam, T., & Yeoh, B. S. A. (2018). Migrant mothers, left-behind fathers: the negotiation of gender subjectivities in Indonesia and the Philippines. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(1), 104-117. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2016.1249349
- Leavitt, H. J., & Whisler, T. L. (1958). Management in the 1980's. *Harvard Business Review*(November).
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1969). *Elementary structure of kinship*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Levitt, P. (2001a). Transnational Migration: Taking Stock and Future Directions. *Global Networks*, 1(3), 195-216.
- Levitt, P. (2001b). *The Transnational Villagers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Levitt, P. (2004). Salsa and Ketchup: Transnational Migrants Straddle Two Worlds. *Contexts*, 3(2), 20-26.
- Levitt, P. (2005). Building Bridges: What Migration Scholarship and Cultural Sociology have to Say to Each Other. *Poetics*, 33(1), 49-62. doi:10.1016/j.poetic.2005.01.004
- Levitt, P., DeWind, J., & Vertovec, S. (2003). International Perspectives on Transnational Migration: An Introduction. *The International Migration Review*, 37(3), 565-575.
- Levitt, P., & Glick Schiller, N. (2004). Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *The International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1002-1039.
- Levitt, P., & Jaworsky, N. B. (2007). Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, 17-24. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.11.006>

- Licoppe, C. (2004). 'Connected' presence: the emergence of a new repertoire for managing social relationships in a changing communication technoscape. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2004, 22, 135-156. doi:10.1068/d323t
- Lima, A. (2010). *Transnationalism: A New Mode of Immigrant Integration*. Retrieved from The Maurilio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy: <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/b5ea6e3a-e94e-451b-af08-ca9fcc3a1b5b/>
- Liu, M.-M. (2013). Migrant Networks and International Migration: Testing Weak Ties. *Demography*, 50(4), 1243-1277.
- Mabogunje, A. (1970). Systems approach to a theory of rural-urban migration *Geographical Analysis*, 2(1), 1-18.
- Madianou, M. (2016). Ambient co-presence: transnational family practices in polymedia environments. *Global Networks*, 16(2), 183-201.
- Madianou, M., & Miller, D. (2012a). *Migration and new media: transnational families and polymedia*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Madianou, M., & Miller, D. (2012b). Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 169 –187. doi:10.1177/1367877912452486
- Mahler, J. S. (2001). Transnational Relationships: The Struggle to Communicate Across Borders. *Identities*, 7(4), 583-619. doi:10.1080/1070289x.2001.9962679
- Mai, N., & King, R. (2009). Love, Sexuality and Migration: Mapping the Issue(s). *Mobilities*, 4(3), 295-307. doi:10.1080/17450100903195318
- Manful, E., & Cudjoe, E. (2018). Is Kinship Failing? Views on Informal Support by Families in Contact with Social Services in Ghana. *Child & Family Social Work*, 23, 617–624. doi:10.1111/cfs.12452
- Manuh, T. (1998). Ghanaians, Ghanaian Canadians, and Asantes: Citizenship and Identity Among Migrants in Toronto. *Africa Today*, 45(3/4), 481-493.
- Manuh, T. (1999). This place is not Ghana”: Gender and rights discourse among Ghanaian men and women in Toronto. *Ghana Studies*, 2(1999), 77-95.
- Manuh, T. (2011). *Assessment of Libyan returnees in the Brong Ahafo Region*. Accra: UNCT and NADMO.
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in sociology: An introduction*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Mauthner, N. S., & Kazimierczak, K. A. (2018). Theoretical perspectives on technology and society: implications for understanding the relationship between ICTs and family life. In B. B. Neves & C. Casimiro (Eds.), *Connecting families? Information & communication technologies, generations, and the life course*. Bristol University Press: Policy Press.
- Mazrui, A., & Levine, T. K. (1986). *The Africans: A reader*. New York: Praeger.
- Mazzucato, V. (2009). Informal Insurance Arrangements in Ghanaian Migrants’ Transnational Networks: The Role of Reverse Remittances and Geographic Proximity. *World Development*, 37(6), 1105-1115. doi:10.1016/j.worlddev.2008.11.001
- Mazzucato, V. (2015). Transnational families and the well-being of children and caregivers who stay in origin countries. *Social Science and Medicine*, 132, 208-214. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.11.030
- Mazzucato, V., Cebotari, V., Veale, A., White, A., Grassi, M., & Vivet, J. (2015). International Parental Migration and the Psychological Well-being of Children in Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola. *Social Science and Medicine*, 132, 215-224. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.10.058

- Mazzucato, V., Kabki, M., & Smith, L. (2006). Transnational Migration and the Economy of Funerals: Changing Practices in Ghana. *Development and Change*, 37(5), 1047–1072.
- McKie, L. (2005). *Families, violence and social change*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- McLuhan, M. (1994/1964). *Understanding Media The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682.
- Morawska, E. (2001). Structuring migration: The case of polish income-seeking travelers to the West. *Theory and Society*, 30(1), 47-80.
- Morawska, E. (2012). Historical-structural models of international migration. In M. Martiniello & J. Rath (Eds.), *An introduction to international migration studies* (pp. 55-75). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Morgan, D. H. J. (1996). *Family connections*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Mumford, L. (1955). *Technics and civilization*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited.
- Neves, B. B., & Casimiro, C. (2018). *Connecting Families?: Information & Communication Technologies, generations, and the life course* (1 ed.): Bristol University Press.
- Nieswand, B. (2014). The burgers' paradox: Migration and the transnationalization of social inequality in southern Ghana. *Ethnography*, 15(4), 403-425.
- Nkrumah, A. (2018). Immigrants' transnational entrepreneurial activities: The case of Ghanaian immigrants in Canada. *International Migration & Integration*, 19, 195–211. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-017-0535-z>
- Noonan, J. (2012). Ontology. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 578-581). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Nukunya, G. K. (2016). *Tradition and Change in Ghana: An Introduction to Sociology*. Accra: Woeli Publishing Services.
- O'Reilly, M., & Kiyimba, N. (2015). *Advanced qualitative research: A guide to using theory*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- O'Hara, K., Massimi, M., Harper, R., Rubens, S., & Morris, J. (2014). *Everyday dwelling with WhatsApp*. Paper presented at the 17th ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work & social computing, Baltimore, USA.
- Obeng, M. K. M. (2014). Navigating the dragon: Motivations, network and strategies of Ghanaian importers of Chinese products. *The International Journal Of Humanities & Social Studies*, 2(6), 185-194.
- Obeng, M. K. M. (2017). Formation and longevity of network relationship practices of Ghanaian traders importing from China. *Contemporary Journal of African Studies*, 5(1), 1-29.
- Obeng, S. G. (2003). *Language in African Social Interaction: Indirectness in Akan Communication*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Oheneba-Sakyi, Y., & Takyi, B. K. (2007). Introduction to the study of African families: A framework for analysis. In Y. Oheneba-Sakyi & B. K. Takyi (Eds.), *African families at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (pp. 1-23). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company.
- Olupot, N. E. (2020). Using MTN Homeland to Send Money & Airtime Top-ups. Retrieved from <https://pctechmag.com/2020/05/using-mtn-homeland-application/>

- Oppong, C. (1980). From love to institution: Indications of change in Akan marriage. *Journal of Family History*, 5(2), 197-209.
- Owusu, G. (2008). Indigenes' and migrants' access to land in peri-urban areas of Accra, Ghana. *International Development Planning Review*, 30(2), 177-198.
- Owusu, G., & Agyei-Mensah, S. (2011). A comparative study of ethnic residential segregation in Ghana's two largest cities, Accra and Kumasi. *Population and Environment*, 32(4), 332-352. doi:10.1007/S11111-010-0131-Z
- Palfrey, J., & Gasser, U. (2008). *Born digital: Understanding the first generation of digital natives*. New York: Basic Books.
- Parreñas, S. R. (2003). The Care Crisis in the Philippines: Children and Transnational Families in the New Global Economy. In B. Ehrenreich & A. R. Hochschild (Eds.), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Parreñas, S. R. (2005). Long Distance Intimacy: Class, Gender and Intergenerational Relations between Mothers and Children in Filipino Transnational Families. *Global Networks*, 5(4), 317-336.
- Pellow, D. (2003). New spaces in Accra: transnational houses. *City & Society*, XV(1), 59-86.
- Pickbourn, L. J. (2011). *Migration, remittances and intra-household allocation in northern Ghana: Does gender matter?* (Doctor of Philosophy), University of Massachusetts Amherst Unpublished PhD Dissertation.
- Piore, M. J. (1979). *Birds of passage: Migrant labour and industrial societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Poeze, M., Dankyi, K. E., & Mazzucato, V. (2017). Navigating Transnational Childcare Relationships: Migrant Parents and their Children's Caregivers in the Origin Country. *Global Networks*, 17(1), 1470-2266. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12135>
- Portes, A. (2001). Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 1(3), 181-193.
- Portes, A. (2003). Conclusion: Theoretical Convergencies and Empirical Evidence in the Study of Immigrant Transnationalism. *The International Migration Review*, 37(3), 874-892.
- Portes, A., Guarnizo, L. E., & Landolt, P. (1999). The study of transnationalism: pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field. *The study of transnationalism: Pitfalls and promise of an emergent research field, ethnic and racial studies*, 22(2), 217-237. doi:10.1080/014198799329468
- Postman, N. (1992). *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Prensky, M. (2006). *Don't Bother Me, Mom - I'm Learning!*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- Press, R. (2017). Dangerous crossings: Voices from the African migration to Italy/Europe. *Africa Today*, 64(1), 3-27.
- Pribilsky, J. (2004). 'Aprendemos a convivir': conjugal relations, co-parenting, and family life among Ecuadorian transnational migrants in New York City and the Ecuadorian Andes. *Global Networks*, 4(3), 313-334.
- Ravenstein, E. G. (1885). The laws of migration – I. *Journal of the Statistical Society*, 48(2), 167-227.
- Ravenstein, E. G. (1889). The laws of migration – II. *Journal of the Statistical Society*, 52(2), 214-301.
- Reid, J. C. (1995). The History of the Family. In S. L. Cahill & D. Mieth (Eds.), *The Family*. London: SCM Press Ltd.

- Rodenburg, J. (1997). *In the Shadow of Migration: Rural Women and their Households in North Tapanuli, Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press.
- Rogers, E. M. (1986). *Communication Technology: The New Media*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Rogers, E. M. (2000). The extensions of men: The correspondence of Marshall McLuhan and Edward T. Hall. *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(1), 117-135. doi:10.1207/S15327825MCS0301\_06
- Rupšienė, L., & Pranskunienė, R. (2010). The variety of grounded theory: Different versions of the same method or different methods? *Socialiniai Mokslai*, 4(70), 7-19.
- Sacasas, L. M. (2020). The Analog City and the Digital City. *The New Atlantis*, 61, 3-18.
- Sassen, S. (1991). *The global city*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Silva, E. B. (2018). Afterword: Digital connections and family practices. In B. B. Neves & C. Casimiro (Eds.), *Connecting families?: information & communication technologies, generations, and the life course* (pp. 273-294). Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Silverstone, R., Hirsch, E., & Morley, D. (2005). Information and communication technologies and the moral economy of the household. In R. Silverstone & E. Hirsch (Eds.), *Consuming technologies: Media and information in domestic spaces* (pp. 13-28). New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Sismondo, S. (1993). Some social constructions. *Social Studies of Science*, 23(3), 515-553. doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/370258
- Sismondo, S. (2010). *An introduction to science and technology studies*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Smith, L., & Mazzucato, V. (2009). Constructing homes, building relationships: migrant investments in houses. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 100((5)), 662–673.
- Solimano, A. (2010). *International migration in an age of globalization: Historical and recent experiences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stark, O., & Bloom, E. D. (1985). The New Economics of Labor Migration. *The American Economic Review*, 75(2), 173-178.
- Stone, L. (2012). Epistemology. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 265-268). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Takyi, K. B. (2003). Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes: Selecting a Marital Partner in Ghana. In R. R. Hamon & B. B. Ingoldsby (Eds.), *Mate selection across cultures* (pp. 79-94). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc.
- Takyi, K. B., & Gyimah, S. O. (2007). Matrilineal Family Ties and Marital Dissolution in Ghana. *Journal of Family Issues*, 28(5), 682-705.
- Tanle, A. (2012). Exploring health implications associated with irregular migration from Ghana to Lybia and beyond *Ghana Journal of Geography*, 4(1), 65-82.
- Tapscott, D. (2009). *Grown up digital: How the net generation is changing your world*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Taylor, E. J. (1999). The new economics of labour migration and the role of remittances in the migration process. *International Migration*, 37(1), 63-88.
- Tazanu, P. M. (2015). New media and expectations of social closeness: the mobile phone and narratives of “throwing people away” in Cameroonian transnational social relationships. *Modern Africa: Politics, History and Society*, 3(2), 101-126.
- Thomas, W. I., & Znaniecki, F. (1918). *The Polish peasant in Europe and America: Volume I primary-group organization*. Boston: Richard G. Badger, The Gorham Press.

- Tiemoko, R. (2004). Migration, Return and Socioeconomic Change in West Africa: The Role of Family. *POPULATION, SPACE AND PLACE*, 10, 155–174.
- Todaro, M. P., & Smith, S. C. (2012). *Economic development* (11th ed.). Boston: Addison-Wesley.
- Tsai, M.-C., & Dzorgbo, S. D.-B. (2012). Familial Reciprocity and Subjective Well-being in Ghana. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74, 215 – 228.
- Twenge, J. (2017). *IGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood – and what that means for the rest of us*. Simon and Schuster: New York.
- UN DESA Population Division. (2019). *International Migrant Stock 2019* Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates19.asp>
- United Nations. (2014). *The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Migrants in an Irregular Situation*. Geneva: United Nations.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2019). *Human Development Report 2019 - Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century*. Retrieved from United Nations Development Programme: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Van Hear, N. (2010). Theories of migration and social change. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(10), 1531-1536. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2010.489359
- Vertovec, S. (2004). Cheap calls: the social glue of migrant transnationalism. *Global Networks*, 4(2), 219–224.
- Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Waldinger, R., & Fitzgerald, D. (2004). Transnationalism in question. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109(5), 1177–1195.
- Wallerstein, I. (1979). *The capitalist world economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- WhatsApp. (2020). WhatsApp Blog. Retrieved from <https://blog.whatsapp.com/>
- Wilding, R. (2006). ‘Virtual’ Intimacies? Families Communicating across Transnational Contexts. *Global Networks*, 6(2), 125–142.
- Wimmer, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2003). Methodological nationalism, the social sciences, and the state of migration: An essay in historical epistemology. *International Migration Review*, 37(3), 576-610.
- Wong, M. (2006). The Gendered Politics of Remittances in Ghanaian Transnational Families. *Economic Geography*, 82(4), 355-381.
- Wyatt, S. (2008). Technological determinism is dead; Long live technological determinism. In E. J. Hackett, O. Amsterdamska, M. Lynch, & J. Wajcman (Eds.), *The handbook of science and technology studies* (pp. 165-180). Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Yankah, K. (1991). Oratory in Akan society. *Discourse & Society*, 2(1), 47-64.
- Yankah, K. (1995). *Speaking for the chief: Okyeame and the politics of Akan royal oratory*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Yeboah, M. A. (2010). Urban poverty, livelihood, and gender: Perceptions and experiences of porters in Accra, Ghana. *Africa Today*, 56(3), 42-60.

## APPENDIX I

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, UG



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**  
ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)

*P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana*

My Ref. No.....

11<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Ms Esther Asenso-Agyemang  
Department of Sociology  
University of Ghana  
Legon

Dear Ms. Asenso-Agyemang,

**ECH 194/17-18: Patterns of Social Interactions in Transnational Families in Ghana in the Context of Innovations in Information Communication Technologies (ICT).**

This is to advise you that the above reference study has been presented to the Ethics Committee for the Humanities for a full board review and the following actions taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below:

Expiry Date:	11/02/20
On Agenda for:	Initial submission
Date of Submission:	17/07/18
ECH Action:	Approved
Reporting:	Quarterly

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

Prof. C. Charles Mate-Kole  
ECH Vice Chair

CC: Prof. Akosua A. Darkwah, Department of Sociology, UG

Tel: +233-303933866

Email: [ech@ug.edu.gh](mailto:ech@ug.edu.gh)

## **APPENDIX II**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

#### **TITLE OF RESEARCH**

Patterns of Social Interactions in Ghanaian Transnational Families in the Context of Innovations in Information Communication Technologies

#### **GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT RESEARCH**

This study aims to determine how persons who have relations in Ghana and abroad stay in touch with each other as the means of staying connected changes over time and the benefits and disadvantages of this process. In gathering the necessary data for the study, your inputs would be required given the fact that your ace television programme – ‘Greetings from Abroad’ provides a useful bridge to connect Ghanaians abroad and their relations back home in Ghana.

This interview is expected to last not more than 40 minutes.

#### **BENEFITS/RISKS OF THE STUDY**

The study is purely for academic purposes. Therefore, whatever information is gathered from you would help to deepen our understanding of the research objectives, as already stated. There are no potential risks associated with the study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

To ensure that no information you share, especially during the interview, is lost, all responses, if you agree, would be recorded with this recorder. However, be rest assured that whatever information is gathered from you would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. In the actual research report, neither your name nor any descriptions of you would be linked to any of your responses highlighted (should I deem it necessary to do so). All other persons (including the research assistants and supervisors who come into contact with your responses would, as required by the University’s Ethical Committee) treat your inputs into the research with the utmost confidentiality.

#### **COMPENSATION**

Kindly note that your participation in the study does not attract any compensation.

## WITHDRAWAL FROM STUDY

Kindly note that your participation in this study is purely voluntary and that you may withdraw at any time without any form of penalty. More specifically, understand that you will not be adversely affected if you decline to participate or later stop participating after you have given your consent. Please note again that whenever the research team receives information that you may have to stop participating in the study, such information would not be withheld from you or your legal representative. Also, any information the research team would receive which would indicate your willingness to participate in the study despite your earlier withdrawal, such information would not be withheld from you or your legal representative. In such an instance, you can determine an appropriate time and venue to contact you again for the interviewing to continue.

In the course of our interactions, should you feel uncomfortable with the line of questioning or should there be an external interruption, such as your need to attend to an emergency, kindly feel free to exit the study.

## CONTACT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Should you have any additional questions or information about the research, kindly contact the following: **Head, Department of Sociology, P. O. Box LG 65, University of Ghana, Legon. +233 302 500 312**
- Additionally, you may get in touch with me after this interaction concerning your participation in the study at the following address: **Esther Asenso-Agyemang, Department of Sociology, P. O. Box LG 65, University of Ghana, Legon. + 233 20 956 24 27; easenso-agyemang@st.ug.edu.gh**
- If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, the University of Ghana at [ech@isser.edu.gh](mailto:ech@isser.edu.gh) / [ech@ug.edu.gh](mailto:ech@ug.edu.gh) or 00233- 303-933-866.

## SECTION C- PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

**"I have read or have had someone read all of the above, asked questions, received answers regarding participation in this study, and am willing to give consent for me, my child/ward, to participate in this study. I will not have waived any of my rights by signing this consent form. Upon signing this consent form, I will receive a copy for my records."**

---

Name of Participant

---

Signature or mark of Participant

---

Date

**If a participant cannot read and or understand the form themselves, a witness must sign here:**

I was present while the benefits, risks and procedures were read to the volunteer. All questions were answered, and the volunteer has agreed to take part in the research.

---

Name of witness

---

Signature of witness / Mark

---

Date

I certify that nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research have been explained to the above individual.

---

Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

---

Date

## APPENDIX III

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANT

#### **Section 1: Demographic Details:**

1. Gender
2. Level of Education
3. Marital Status
4. Number of Children (if any)
5. Age in completed years
6. Occupation
7. Religion
8. Ethnicity

#### **Section 2: History of Greetings from Abroad**

1. Can you give me some historical background on Greetings from Abroad, particularly when it was started, what influenced the decision to start, and how the programme was rolled out?
2. How has the programme evolved?
3. What would you say have been some of the most significant changes in the programme since its inception?
4. What brought about those changes?

#### **Section 3: Building Bridges between relations in Ghana and Abroad**

1. Which countries do you usually tour for the Greetings from Abroad Programme? (and why?)
2. How do you meet the Ghanaians who send their 'greetings' home?
3. Can you give a general overview of the persons who generally come on board the Programme? (age category; migration status - regular, that is, those **with** the necessary legal documents or irregular, that is, those **without** the necessary legal documents; gender; among others)
4. Despite the general focus of the Programme, how are you able to also 'carry Ghana to Abroad'?

#### **Section 4: Content and Outcomes of Interactions**

1. **Generally, what is the content of the interactions? (In order words, how do those persons who participate in the Programme 'greet' their families in Ghana?)**

2. What do you think may motivate participants of the Programme to go the extra mile of sending greetings home to their families in Ghana?
3. Is there any cost to participate in the Programme?

### **Section 5: Changes in Media of communication**

1. Do you think changes in the technologies for staying connected (voice and video calls, SMS, voice recordings, etc., over smartphones and the internet) have constrained or helped promote the Greetings from Abroad Programme?
2. How have you integrated some of the advances in the technologies for staying connected into the Greetings from Abroad Programme?

**Do you have any further inputs to make which would be useful to the study?**

### **Section 6: Conclusions**

- Reflective Space
- Find out if the participant has questions for you
- Wrap up questions may be determined by thoughts during the reflective space
- Ask about the possibility of interview referrals
- Thank the participant

**You may take his/her contact for further follow-up questions.**

## APPENDIX IV

### INTERVIEW GUIDE – MIGRANTS ABROAD

#### **Section 1: Demographic Details:**

9. Gender
10. Level of Education
11. Marital Status
12. Number of Children (if any)
13. Age in completed years
14. Occupation
15. Religion
16. Ethnicity

#### **Section 2: Migration information**

17. How long have you been abroad? (outside of Ghana)
18. Which country do you live in now?
19. What is your status in your current country of residence? (Clue: documented or undocumented resident, visitor, etc.)
20. What was your status during your initial arrival in the country?
21. What was the motivation behind your migration?
22. Do you have relations in Ghana you maintain contact with? (If yes, who are they to you?)

#### **Section 3: Interaction Patterns**

23. Do you communicate with your relations in Ghana? (Probe to determine if there are communication links among all (if applicable) relations.
24. Which of your relations in Ghana do you communicate with on a regular basis? (Probe to determine why?)
25. Probe to determine frequency and modes of communication (explore further on the frequency of usage of all the different media mentioned)
26. Probe to determine how the communication is initiated and who usually does the initiation

#### **Section 4: Content and Outcomes of Interactions**

27. Generally, (in broader terms), what do you usually talk about when you interact with your relations abroad? Probe to determine whether the content of the interactions differ based on those involved in the communication
28. What motivates you to maintain contact with your relations in Ghana?
29. Do you get any tangible benefits from the interactions (e.g. remittances, ideas, practices, etc.)?

30. If yes, share (probe frequency, possibly quantum if applicable of benefits)

### **Section 5: Changes in Media of communication**

31. If relations have been abroad long enough, ask about how the modes of communication have changed over time
32. Probe on what brought about the changes at the personal (micro) level
33. Probe to determine whether the variations have been beneficial or constraining or both (ask for specific references to buttress the point).
34. Ask about how the interlocutor feels about the changes in the modes of communication
35. Have the variations influenced in any way the outcomes of the interactions such as the frequency of sending remittances, monitoring, emotional support

### **Section 6: Tensions and Conflicts**

- Do you face any particular challenges when communicating with your family members who are in Ghana?
- What are some of these challenges?
  - probe on challenges related to the ICT media usage such as ‘know-how’ of the user;
  - adequacy of ICT infrastructure such as internet strength, the stability of voice calls;
  - additional challenges related to gender and or age of the interactional partners; and
  - challenges related to the content of the interaction
- How are they often resolved?
- Do you think these challenges would have manifested if you were living together in the same country (whether Ghana or abroad)? (Why do you think so?)

### **Section 7: Conclusions**

- Reflective Space
- Find out if the participant has questions for you
- Wrap up questions may be determined by thoughts during the reflective space
- Ask about the possibility of contact information of the relations in Ghana (if necessary) and seek consent to get in touch with them for corroborative responses.
- Thank the participant

**You may take his/her contact for further follow-up questions.**

## APPENDIX V

### INTERVIEW GUIDE – NON-MIGRANT RELATIONS

#### **Section 1: Demographic Details:**

36. Gender
37. Level of Education
38. Marital Status
39. Age in completed years
40. Occupation
41. Religion
42. Ethnicity

#### **Section 2: Migration information**

43. Has any of your family relations (both nuclear and extended) migrated to destinations outside Ghana?
44. If yes, who are they to you?
45. How long have they been away?
46. Which countries do they live in now?
47. Probe to determine whether they used regular or irregular means to migrate
48. Probe if the status in host countries has been regularized.

#### **Section 3: Interaction Patterns**

49. Do you communicate with your relations outside the country? (Probe to determine if there are communication links among all (if applicable) relations outside the country.)
50. Which relations outside the country do you communicate with on a regular basis? (probe to determine why?)
51. Probe to determine frequency and modes of communication (explore further on the frequency of usage of all the different media mentioned)
52. Probe to determine how the communication is initiated and who usually does the initiation

#### **Section 4: Content and Outcomes of Interactions**

53. What do you usually talk about when you interact with your relations abroad, probe to determine whether the content of the interactions differ based on those involved in the communication?
54. What motivates you to maintain contact with your relations abroad?
55. Do you get any tangible benefits from the interactions (e.g. remittances, ideas, practices, etc.)?
56. If yes, share (probe frequency, possibly quantum if applicable of benefits)

### **Section 5: Changes in Media of communication**

57. If relations have been abroad long enough, ask about how the modes of communication have changed over time
58. Probe on what brought about the changes at the personal (micro) level
59. Probe to determine whether the variations have been beneficial or constraining or both (ask for specific references to buttress the point).
60. Ask about how the interlocutor feels about the changes in the modes of communication
61. Have the variations influenced in any way the outcomes of the interactions such as the frequency of sending remittances, monitoring, emotional support

### **Section 6: Tensions and Conflicts**

- Do you face any particular challenges when communicating with your family members who are abroad?
  
- What are some of these challenges?
  - probe on challenges related to the ICT media usage such as ‘know-how of the user’, adequacy of ICT infrastructure such as internet strength, the stability of voice calls;
  - additional challenges related to gender and or age of the interactional partners; and
  - challenges related to the content of the interaction
  
- How are they often resolved?
  
- Do you think these challenges would have manifested if those relations were living with you in Ghana? (Why do you think so?)

### **Section 7: Conclusions**

- Reflective Space
- Find out if the participant has questions for you
- Wrap up questions may be determined by thoughts during the reflective space
- Ask about the possibility of contact information of the relations abroad and seek consent to get in touch with them for corroborative responses.
- Thank the participant

**You may take his/her contact for further follow-up questions.**