Does structure of social relationships change in a transnational setting? The making and maintenance of transnational networks between Ghana and The Netherlands

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Transnationalism studies argue that modern information and communication technologies enable migrants to maintain contact with their home country more frequently, with greater speed and in greater quantity than even just fifty years ago. At the same time, network members at home have more means at their disposal through remittances sent by migrants and communication technology gives them more opportunities for calling migrants to their "duties" as providers of their extended family. In this way the kinship relationships that are so important in many cultures where migrants come from for organizing things as disparate as businesses and one's social security are maintained.

This view, however, assumes a kind of automatism in kinship relations: i.e., that kinship relations are automatically maintained in a transnational setting. It does not problematize the fact that migrants come into contact with new economic opportunities and institutions in receiving countries that may lead them to want to adopt new kinds of behavior and establish different kinds of ties that are seen as more "fitting" in their new context. These changes in migrant behavior and norms can lead to a change in the structure of social relationships.

This paper systematically investigates how transnational relationships are created and maintained across large distances. This is done through the analysis of a unique data set of a matched sample of migrants and their network members between Ghana and The

Netherlands. The paper analyzes data from two sources. First, a network survey conducted amongst 106 Ghanaian migrants in The Netherlands using a name generator questionnaire. Second, in-depth studies of thirty-three networks resulting in 131 respondents located in Ghana and The Netherlands followed over a 3-year period during which a network study, in-depth interviews, a transaction study and participant observation were conducted by a team of researchers.

The paper conducts a social network analysis on transnational networks by characterizing them according to size, density and geographical locations. It then analyzes the different types of relationships that exist within transnational networks, what actions network members engage in so as to maintain these relationships and what value they attach to these relationships. Particular attention is given to how information and communication technologies are used by migrants in order to manage, and at times restrict, the flow of information reaching network members. In a second part, the paper focuses on the role of three types of relations within transnational networks: non-kin friendships in Ghana, fellow church members in The Netherlands, and friends and sexual partners in The Netherlands.