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Transnational Paradigm within Immigrant Political Integration Discourse
The Case of Ghanaians in the Netherlands

Mary Boatemaa Setrana
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This study examines the interplay between transnational political practice and political integration of immigrants. The paper further poses two key questions: does transnational politics affect the political integration of immigrants? And does transnational political practice compete with or complement political integration in the host country? This paper presents a fieldwork on Ghanaian political party branches in the Netherlands and how their members live the multi-stranded political life of both host and home countries between March 2014 and October 2014. The study shows however that in spite of the political participation of Ghanaian immigrants in Amsterdam, political representation in both home and host countries is barely present in both host and home countries. The study also confirms previous studies that transnational politics does not compete rather with but rather complements political integration in the host country.

Keywords: Ghana – Ghanaian – The Netherlands – Vote – Diaspora – External Branches – Political Engagement

Introduction
Over the last few decades, migration scholars have acknowledged that contemporary immigrants and their predecessors have always maintained different forms of ties with their home countries and at the same time incorporated into the host countries (Kyei, Setrana & Arthur, forthcoming; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Portes, 1999; Vertovec, 1999). Immigrant integration has therefore never been a one way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multicultural

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salad bowl but it has always occurred simultaneously in multiple social fields (Levitt, 2009).

Political integration of immigrants has attracted both political and academic attention recently due to the realization of most European receiving countries that immigrants are not returning to their countries of origin (Schierup, Hansen & Castles, 2006). Following up on such notions, studies have shown a positive correlation between political integration and transnational political practices of immigrants (Guarnizio et al, 2003: 1239; Portes, Escobar & Radford, 2007:276; Snel, Engbersen & Leerkes, 2006). Some conclude that political integration and transnational political practices cannot coexist as robust engagement in homeland politics does not allow strong political integration in the host country (Koopmans et al 2005; Morawska, 2003). Others have, however, argued that transnational political practice and political integration could harmonize successfully (Pantoja, 2005; Levitt, 2007). Dedieu et al (2013) for instance, finds a positive relationship between the electoral behaviour of Senegalese migrants in both home and host countries. Despite these conflicting debates, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on transnational political practice and political integration among African migrants in Europe (Boccagni, 2011 and Dedieu et al. 2013). Most of the literature on the transnational engagement of Ghanaian immigrants hinges on their economic activities through individual remittances and Home Town Associations (HTA) (Mazzucato, Kabki, & Smith, 2004; Mazzucato, 2005; Mohan, 2006; Nijenhuis, Zoomer & Meerts, 2012). There is a lacuna in the literature on the systematic study of transnational political practices of Ghanaians abroad vis-à-vis their political integration into the host country.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on transnational political practices and political integration of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Europe using Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands as a case. Although studies on immigrant political integration have examined public policies’ influence on immigrants, this study makes use of transnationalism by adopting the bottom up approach which considers immigrants as active agents who seek to participate in the politics of both home and host countries (Vogel, 2007; Zapata-Barrero, Gabrielli, Sanchez-Montijano & Jaulin, 2013). The paper poses three key questions: do immigrants politically participate in the conventional forms of home and host country politics? Does transnational politics affect the political integration of immigrants? Does transnational political participation compete with or complement political integration in the host country? The paper addresses these questions by investigating how political systems in Ghana influence the political attitudes of immigrants in the country; the theory of transnationalism, transnational politics and political integration; and the complexities and dynamics of these Ghanaian emigrants in transnational politics of both home and host countries. Finally the paper draws conclusions and suggests some recommendations.
Linking Ghana’s Political Systems and Ghanaian Migration to the Netherlands

Distinct from many West African countries, Ghana has an enduring and complex history of human mobility shaped by political events. Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence in 1957 however, due to military takeovers, the first three republics could not last more than one term (Fridy, 2006; Morrison, 2004). Ex-President Rawlings’ second coup in 1981 and the take-over of power from the just elected civilian government after the country had passed through a decade of military rule created the condition for emigration within and out of the West African sub-region (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). Mass Ghanaian immigration to the Netherlands was very keen in this period because coincidentally the Dutch government suffered shortage of manual labour in the factories and service sectors which enabled Ghanaians to enter the Netherlands with little restrictions (van Dijk, 2004). In 2000, the number of Ghanaians living in the Netherlands according to the Dutch government’s official data were 15,610 but as at 2014, the total Ghanaian population in the Netherlands had increased to 22,556 (Statistics Netherlands, 2014).

In spite of the medium and high level of education of Ghanaians in the Netherlands, they are employed in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs mainly due to low proficiency in the Dutch language, discrimination in the labour market (Choenni, 2002) and cumbersome process of foreign diploma recognition by the Dutch government. According to Tonah (2007) and Anarfi, Awusabo-Asare and Nsowah-Nuamah (2003), such discrimination and restrictive measures heighten the engagement of Ghanaian immigrants in the economic and political development of their homeland while negotiating their space in the host country. The relative stable political environment that Ghana’s Fourth Republic which began in 1992 experiences has created windows of opportunities Ghanaians in the Diaspora to engage in transnational political activities in order to contribute to the country’s democratic governance. With limited studies focusing on this area of study, it is important to investigate how the transnational political engagement of external branches of homeland political parties influences immigrants’ political life both at home and abroad.

Conceptualising Transnationalism, Transnational Politics and Political Integration

Transnationalism is defined as the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994: 7). This is possible due to the broader phenomenon of globalization and the advancement of communication technologies that have compressed the distance between time and space (Giddens, 1990; Portes, 2001; Smith, 1998; Vertovec, 2004). Transnational activities could be grouped into: economic, socio-cultural and political activities and they could take place either in the sending or receiving
country (Al-Ali, Black & Koser, 2001:618-626; Portes, 2001; Portes, Guarnizo & Landholt, 1999:222). For the purpose of this paper, transnational political activity is the focus of discussion. Transnational political activity is defined within the frameworks of Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) and Vertovec (2004). Østergaard-Nielsen (2003) describes transnational political activities as immigrants’ engagement in homeland political activism in the host country with regard to issues concerning country of origin and they may include expatriate voting, electoral campaigns and running for political office in the home country. Vertovec (2004) also describes political participation as transnational electoral participation which includes membership in a political party in the country of origin, monetary contributions to these parties, and active involvement in political campaigns in the polity of origin.

Political integration is defined here as the process by which immigrants incorporate into the host society through political engagement, language acquisition, acquiring skills and influencing public policy (Okigbo, 2014; Castles and Miller, 2009). For the purpose of this study, political integration is conceptualised within political participation. The study conceptualizes political participation as the “active dimension of citizenship in which individuals take part in the management of collective affairs of a given political community” (Martiniello, 2006:84). However, within discussions of transnationalism, political participation extends beyond a particular nation. Immigrants are participating both conventionally and less convention across borders through engagement in demonstrations, boycotts, association, voting, and membership to political parties in both host and home countries.

Ghanaian immigrants exercise their fundamental citizenship rights to ensure political stability and growth in their home country while also integrating into the host country. Since Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992) introduced the concept of transnationalism into ethnic and migration studies; there have been various discussions on the transnational practices of immigrants. Yet, only a handful of studies (examples, Kyei et al., forthcoming; Dedieu et al. 2013) have explored the transnational politics of sub-Saharan African immigrants.

**Data and Methods**

This research does not seek to draw representative and generalised conclusions from the research findings but to serve as a breaking ground for future research. The study focuses on the external political party branches of the two main political parties in Ghana namely the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC). ‘External branch’ or political party branch in the Diaspora is defined here as any group of immigrants who come together in the host country to share the vision and mission of any political party in the home country and are recognized by the political party’s headquarters in the country of origin. This decision is justified by the results of Ghana’s
presidential elections since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1992 during which the NPP and NDC obtained more than 90 per cent of the total vote cast (Electoral Commission of Ghana, 2013).

The study was conducted among members of Ghanaian external political party branches in Amsterdam between March, 2014 and October, 2014. Questionnaires were sent to the list 1 of email addresses obtained from NPP and NDC external political party branches in Amsterdam while others were also distributed during the meetings of the external political party branches in Amsterdam. Data for this study were drawn from various sources in order to ensure triangulation of data (Flick, 2002). Questionnaires were used in soliciting information on individual level data on the level of education, migration history, transnational political activities and practices and political integration variables in the host country. After follow up telephone calls and email reminders 45 people responded but we persisted through attendance of meetings and other social activities organised by the external political party branches till we had additional 5 respondents to sum up to a total of 50 respondents who were all card bearing members of the external political party branches. According to researchers, studies that seek understanding do not need huge numbers and therefore recommends limited sample size (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). In this case, fifty is relatively good a number to provide us with an understanding of issues under study.

In addition, in depth interviews were conducted with founding members and current leaders of the external branches to ascertain information on the life history of the external branches, activities, challenges and successes of the external branches. We also observed and participated in external branch meetings, social gatherings such as picnics, funerals among others. We monitored Ghanaian television and radio programs on politics in Amsterdam and in the Diaspora. Participating in these activities was valuable for building rapport, establishing trust and understanding the parties’ activities in different settings. Data from the in depth interviews were transcribed, edited and analysed based on themes while the questionnaires were computed with SPSS tools (version twenty) to develop frequencies.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents
Out of the 50 respondents, there were more males (33) than females (17) in both external party branches. 14 and 36 of the respondents were NDC and NPP members respectively. This is not surprising because they are proportionate to the total number of NPP and NDC members in the external branches that are about 200 and 50 respectively. The respondents were either relatively young (21-31) or relatively old (41-65). Majority (27) of the members have obtained tertiary education, 20 have completed secondary education while a few (3) have only primary education. All of the respondents are either sympathizers or card bearing members of a Dutch political party. Interestingly, 28 of the participants
vote regularly in the Dutch local elections, 15 vote often while 7 have never voted before because they did not qualify to vote at the last elections. Most (27) of the respondents have lived in Europe for more than two decades while 10 have spent about a decade and the rest are second generation migrants. The Majority (41) of the members have Dutch citizenship and 2 have European Union citizenship. Two (2) of the respondents have Dutch temporary residence cards, 4 have Dutch permanent residence cards, and only one has no residence card. The high level of naturalisation manifests the generous Dutch citizenship law which facilitates political integration. The high educational status and long period of stay in host country support the variables raised by previous studies on political transnationalism and political integration (Martiniello, 2005; Mugge, 2010; Portes, Escobar & Radford, 2007).

Political Mobilisation and Representation of the External Branches beyond Borders

The 1992 constitution of the Fourth Republic allows Ghanaians to express their freedom of membership or association to any political party of their choice. Some Ghanaian immigrants organised themselves to form external branches in the Diaspora to promote and defend the liberal democratic governance back home. Ghanaian immigrants in the Netherlands were the formation of the NPP. Ghanaian immigrants who are inclined towards the ideals of the NPP took the lead to mobilise themselves to form external branches from the late 1990s in the United States of America (US), United Kingdom (UK), China, Germany, Italy, France and the Netherlands. Among these external branches the first to be formed was the NPP external branch in the Netherlands. A founding member of the NPP Holland branch recounted that:

In 1998, some of us came together to form the NPP Holland branch. In this period there were no external branches in the UK, US, Germany or France. Dan Botwe was then the NPP General Secretary and he used to visit us regularly to encourage and direct us. We were the first external branch to be formed in the Diaspora. In our first meeting in the house of one of our members we were about ten people but the numbers increased steadily to over one hundred within a year (interview on 01-04-2014).

Interestingly, on the other hand, some sympathizers of the NDC party began to mobilize Ghanaian immigrants in the Netherlands only when the NDC had been in opposition for some period. A founding member of the NDC recounted that:

1. 250 contacts were received from these two political parties.
I am one of the first persons to defend the NDC on air (radio and television) here in Amsterdam. Before 2007 there was no NDC external branch in the Netherlands. It was after the media programmes that some of us decided to form an organisation that is affiliated to the NDC which we did in 2007. In 2005, we started advocating for NDC on Ghanaian radio stations in Amsterdam like Recogin and Akasanoma and with time some people were attracted to our course of action so in 2007, we decided to form an NDC external branch in the Netherlands which we did. We invited the national executives from Ghana to witness the inaugural ceremony.

The dynamism in the formation of these political party branches is vital in the sense that they were formed at the “loss of political power” or “in times of opposition”. The external branches enhance the implementation of sound policies and good governance by putting pressure on the government through the media back home and in the host country. Since both the NDC and NPP external branches were formed when their parties were in opposition, they constructively criticize the government as a way of promoting their party’s chances of winning power in the next elections.

Once the political party gains power, the elites in the external branches seek to contribute directly to the governance and development in the home country so little attention is paid to the branch meetings. The members or masses also do not feel the need to engage so much with the external branch as what they fought for has been successful. A founding member of the NPP noted that:

In 2001 when Kuffuor won the election, a leading member of the NPP Holland branch informed us that his main aim was to help unseat the Rawlings government and if it was achieved, he was no more interested in any NPP external branch.... I went back home after 2001 for some time and when I came back from Ghana I was informed that the NPP Holland branch had collapsed totally (interview on 20-07-2014).

Another founding member of the NPP Holland branch also recounted that:

One of the reasons why the NPP Holland branch collapsed was that most of the members felt their party was in power so there was no need for the branch to exist. After we got hold of the power, people were not interested anymore. After the 2001 election, the party branch existed for two years. Before the 2000 elections we met once every week but after the elections we met once a month. Even with that people did not attend meetings and more importantly they did not see the need to pay dues and so we could not afford to pay for the rent of the hall that was why meetings were suspended (interview on 11-08-2014).
The findings also show that members become more active after settling in the host country because the external branches support political parties back home partly with the aim of maintaining ties and having a sustainable return in future. A founding member of one of the external political party branches said that:

When our party is in power, if any of our members wants to go back home for look got we issue a letter to indicate that he or she is a member of the external political party branch here in Amsterdam. It does not guarantee that the job will be offered but it facilitates the search for job as those at home know our valuable contribution to the party. One of our members is the government’s spokesperson in one of the state owned corporations in Ghana. Others have also obtained some government contracts which they are executing (interview on 06-09-2014).

Such reasons for joining associations are found to be very relevant in return and reintegration processes back home. Setrana and Tonah (2014) suggest that associations, relatives and friends are significant in ensuring sustainable return. Therefore, in as much as these networks are crucial in the integrating processes, they are also helpful in the return processes.

Voting Patterns and Political Integration of the members of the External Branches

From the data, 14 of the respondents are ‘card bearing’ members of Dutch political parties and 36 are sympathisers of a Dutch political party. The findings show that most of the respondents are aligned to left wing parties which support previous work by Tillie (1998) on the voting pattern of immigrants in the Netherlands. The findings also show that most of the respondents are active voters in the Dutch local elections which is a positive indicator of political integration.

Consequently, Article 9 and 10 (1d) of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) (2010) and article 8 of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (2009) recognize external political party branches as integral part of the parties and they are governed by the constitution of their respective parties in the country of origin. The external branches have voting rights in the election of the national executives and the presidential candidate of the party similar to any constituency in Ghana. The external political party branches of the NPP recently held a press conference after the election of the party’s presidential candidate in 2014 in Accra. They communicated that:

2. A member is defined here as any person who bears the membership card of a political party
3. A sympathizer is defined here as any person who shares the vision and mission of a political party but he or she is not registered in the political party.
Each external political party branch presented three super delegates for the election of the presidential candidate. Before we travelled from abroad to cast our votes, most of the branches held internal elections for their members to decide their preferred presidential candidate. For example, China voted 85.4%, Germany voted 99.6%, and Belgium voted 100% for Nana Addo-Dunkwa Akufo Addo (NPP External Branches, April, 2014).

External political party branches directly influence homeland political parties through the exercise of their voting rights which is considered a pivotal factor in transnational politics (see Mugge, 2011; Simpson Bueker, 2005). Members of external political party branches live as trans-border citizens (Glick Schiller and Fouron, 1998) through their regular influence in the politics of both host and home countries. This was explained by one of the male respondents: He said:

In 2007, we attended the election of the NPP presidential candidate for 2008 general elections. Our branch (NPP Amsterdam) had only one vote so our chairman voted on our behalf and we went to support him and to participate in the programme. I am a strong sympathiser of PVDA here in Amsterdam and I always vote for this party and nothing will shift my support. In my home [in the Netherlands] I have the flags of NPP and PVDA (Member, June, 2014).

One of the female respondents said that I am a council member in the Municipal Assembly of Amsterdam Southeast and a member of the NPP branch in Amsterdam. I pay my dues in both parties (Member, April 2014). These immigrants politically engage in decision making at home and abroad. They contribute their finances and knowledge to destination polity through their participation in Municipal Assembly elections.

Challenges of Transnational Political Engagement by the External Political Party Branches
In the literature on political integration and transnational political practices, the hegemony of host and home societies over immigrants is seldom discussed. There are unequal access to political opportunities in both home and host countries in spite of the active political participation of immigrants in transnational politics and political integration. Political representation of immigrants in both home and host country politics are very minimal and these are as a result of structural barriers that prevent immigrants from full political integration (see Okigbo, 2014; Castles & Miller, 2009). In the host country immigrants’ representation are limited by citizenship laws and equally important are race, colour and sex. In the home country immigrants are considered mainly for their
financial and human resources to support their political parties. However, the act 55(14) of the 1992 constitution and the political parties act 547,2000 of Ghana disallow foreign contributions to political funding in Ghana (Owusu, accessed online, 25/09/2015). Yet external branches financially assist their mother parties back home. Members expressed grief at the minimal level of engagement despite the enormous assistance they offer to the administration of the homeland political party. One of the key informants narrated that:

The party officials back home come to appeal for funds to support their campaign after which they ignore us. We spend all our resources on the party’s activities but we are not rewarded accordingly. They treat us like ‘their money producing machines’ [literally translated as mere financial contributors] so they do not acknowledge our efforts (party executive, July, 2014).

Furthermore Ghana’s Citizenship Act 591, article 16 (1) limits dual citizenship holders from holding certain political and key positions. The data show that none of the respondents have held or hold any political position in Ghana in spite of attempts made by the respondents individually or collectively. On the other hand, the party members see themselves as being cheated by their mother political party because they are hardly involved in the decision making of the party at origin. One of the male respondents explained that:

During the eight years of NPP administration we never received even a letter of appreciation from the headquarters for our contribution both financially and in kind. The only favour was the directive which was given for the employment of one of our members in the embassy but the ambassador ignored that (Party executive, October, 2014).

Also in the Netherlands, the data indicates that five of the respondents have contested at various times as candidates in their respective political parties in the Dutch local elections but only one has succeeded in becoming a Municipal Council member. The responses from the interview shows that members desire to hold more positions in their respective communities at destination in order to contribute to the wellbeing of the citizens.

Another challenge expressed during the interviews was the inability of Ghanaians to vote in Ghana’s elections from the Diaspora in spite of the enactment of the Representation of People’s Amendment Law (ROPAL) since 2007 (Awumbila and Teye, 2014: 8). From the data it emerged that ROPAL has not been implemented due to lack of political will, administrative challenges of the Ghana’s Electoral Commission and resources. Leadership of the external political party branches are concerned and looking forward to the implementation of this law in the upcoming elections in 2016. Ghana’s presidential election results are very tight and the votes of Ghanaians in the Diaspora could make a
lot of changes which some fear might lead to mayhem on the part of the losing side.

**Conclusion**

Since the introduction of the 1992 constitution, Ghana has seen tremendous progress in its democratic governance through the concerted efforts of its citizens including the diaspora. Through the formation of the two major political party branches in the Netherlands, Ghanaian immigrants have extended Ghana’s democracy beyond the nation’s border. These external political party branches in the Netherlands are recognized and governed by the homeland parties. They have campaigned and succeeded in the election of national executives and the presidential candidates of their respective parties back home. Through concerted efforts of Ghanaians in the Diaspora since 2002 has amended its nationality law which allows the holding of dual citizenship that provides a better chance to politically participate ‘here’ and ‘there’. These findings show that Ghanaian immigrants in external branches are active political agents who live simultaneously in the host and home countries (Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007). In addition, the data also shows that some respondents are politically integrated into the Netherlands society as they participate in the electoral process of the Dutch community.

More so is the provision of support to new entrants and return migrants by these external political party branches. These roles do not only lie in the purview of ethnic and religious associations but also political party branches in the diaspora. According to the qualitative interviews, the association also performs other social and emotional functions. In order for new entrants to actively participate in the daily activities of the external political party branches, the leadership helps them in finding accommodation, jobs, documentation and other social welfare services (Peil and Sada, 1981 cited in Owusu, 2000). The external political party branches like any other association provide a wide range of networks at the origin, which may be lost upon migration (Lloyd, 1966).

Despite these progressive reports, respondents express disappointment in the delayed implementation of the Representation of People’s Act (Act 699). In order to reciprocate their enormous contribution to home country development, the external political party branches are calling on the homeland political parties, parliamentarians and the Electoral Commission of Ghana to enfranchise the diaspora. They demand the right to vote in the national electoral process like other African diaspora (Dedieu et al, 2013).

Again, the study recommends further studies into the transnational political participation of second generation migrants from Europe in Ghanaian politics and a larger scale and comparative study among different Ghanaian external political party branches across Europe.
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