ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Following the 'hype': The role of leisure practices during 'homeland' visits in transnational youth's way of relating to Ghana

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Abstract

Drawing on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands and Ghana, this paper combines 'return' mobilities literature and youth studies to analyse the role of leisure practices during 'homeland' visits in transnational youth's way of relating to Ghana when they are entering into adulthood. Using the notion of mobility trajectories, the paper shows that leisure practices facilitate young people's ability to establish and renew intimate transnational relationships with diasporic friends, and Ghana-based same-generation relatives and romantic partners. Differing from earlier stays in Ghana, young people expressed their emerging sense of independence by exploring alternative sides of the country with these peers, based on common interests and belonging to the same life-cycle cohort. The findings add complexity to the notion of the 'homeland' as a monolithic place of reconnecting with family and roots by drawing attention to the intersection between young people's pathways to adulthood and transnational mobility.

KEYWORDS
Ghana, leisure, peer relationships, the Netherlands, transnational youth, 'home' visits

INTRODUCTION

> Our topic for today is 'Bra Fie: The return of the African Diaspora' … To everyone who is traveling to Ghana; I have some good ideas for sightseeing and going out. And I know that Ghanaians from the diaspora like to go out (laughs). December is going to be turned, it's going to be lit. I know several people who have planned to go from last year. Social media has contributed greatly [to the increased interest in traveling to Ghana]. They see the snaps, footages, and the enjoyment… It seems that this is the season. Frequent travel to Africa is at its peak. Because of this subject, I want to start with a song by [Afrobeats artist] FUSE ODG, who is calling all Africans to come back.

The excerpt above is a segment of a radio show hosted by Akosua, a well-known figure in the Dutch–Ghanaian community. It conveys the affective excitement around traveling to Ghana among young people of Ghanaian background around the world, and especially during the Christmas holidays—a period characterized by festivities, including many that target diaspora tourists. Early in my research with young Dutch-Ghanaians, who were born in Ghana or the Netherlands and mobile between these countries, I was struck by their frequent references to this phenomenon as the newest 'hype'. This centred around the prospect of engaging in leisure practices (i.e., urban nightlife and touristic consumption) with peers and arguably stimulated youth mobility as reflected in Akosua's captivating words. Radio programmes such as the one in the vignette, popular culture and social media actively contributed to the frenzy, which turned Ghana into an attractive leisure destination for young people at a time in which they were entering into adulthood. This phase is characterized by more independence and the creation and maintenance of their own independent relationships.

Ghana presents an interesting case to study young people's experiences in the realm of leisure as it has been cited as one of the leading markets for diaspora tourism in West Africa (Asiedu, 2008). In fact, this sector is increasingly an area of focus for investment and provides a key source of national income. Recent urban development interventions have facilitated the creation of new social spaces in Ghana and more specifically in its capital city (Accra), such as cafés, lounge bars and shopping malls, which are meant to attract more tourists and raise the country's international profile (Fält, 2016). Furthermore, the Ghanaian government welcomes African diasporans as leisure and roots tourists to Ghana by hosting events (Asiedu, 2008), particularly in December as mentioned above, that centre around this groups' interest in heritage, music and dance such as festivals and concerts. Diasporic visitors are part of diverse migration trajectories, including people of Ghanaian background living abroad visiting friends and relatives (VFR) for example but also members of the broader African diaspora such as African Americans visiting the historic sites of slave trade. In the context of this study, the term 'diasporic visitors' refers to Ghanaian-background youth visiting Ghana.

While leisure is an important feature of 'homeland' visits (Janta et al., 2015, p. 593), details of what transpires during such activities, and trips in general, remain relatively unexplored in 'return' mobilities literature. Most scholars frame the experiences of diasporic visitors, and the emotions and affects accompanying these, in terms of familial and ancestral belonging (Baldassar, 2001; Louie, 2004), revealing the ambiguous feelings that people can experience due to negative as well as positive encounters with the 'homeland'. Return mobilities scholars who do foreground diasporic visitors' practices beyond this particular framework often do so in the context of return migration (e.g., Teerling, 2011) or to understand its economic importance (Janta et al., 2015), with some exceptions.

Youth studies have widely discussed the significant role that leisure practices play in the ways in which young people build intimate relationships with peers based on shared interests in their pathway to adulthood (Boogaarts, 2008; Northcote, 2006; Robinson, 2009). However, such research exclusively focuses on peer practices in young people's local environment. Yet, migrant-background youth, and irrespective of whether they are 'first' or 'second' generation, may engage in all sorts of mobilities (Mazzucato, 2015; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018) and give shape to transnational peer relationships in the process.

Inspired by recent research agendas, this paper heeds the call to examine the intersection between transnational youth mobility and the realm of intimate transnational relationships (Cheung et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2018; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018). Drawing on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork with young people of Ghanaian background, this paper investigates how participation in leisure practices during trips to Ghana impacts young people's intimate transnational relationships. To that end, I put youth mobility trajectories, that is, young people's moves in space and time (Mazzucato, 2015), at the centre of analysis. This allows us to understand young people's experiences through the lens of temporality (Cheung et al., 2020) and affect. While a temporal perspective challenges linear ideas about the life and migration course, affect offers insight into young people's (embodied) experiences.

Using the 'hype' as a point of departure, I show how leisure practices help facilitate young people's ability to establish and renew transnational relationships with diasporic friends, Ghana-based same-generation family members and romantic partners during critical moments in their mobility trajectories, namely, when they are entering into adulthood. These intense forms of socializing became common features of young people's trips to Ghana as young adults and enabled exploration and a sense of normalcy, both in terms of their way of relating to peers and to Ghana. Ultimately, this adds complexity to the notion of the 'homeland' as a monolithic place of unchanging familial and ancestral ties.

'HOMELAND' VISITS THROUGH THE LENS OF TEMPORALITY AND AFFECT

Trips made by diasporic visitors, including migrating adults and the so-called second generation, to the 'homeland have been described in various ways by researchers in (transnational) migration, diaspora, tourism and mobility studies, including as visiting family and relatives tourism (VFR) (Uriely, 2010), diaspora tourism (Coles & Timothy, 2004), roots tourism (Louie, 2004) and 'return' visits (Baldassar, 2001). Despite the different foci, a persistent concern for researchers has been to understand how 'homeland' visits affect diasporic visitors' sense of ethnic identity and belonging (Mazzucato & van Geel, 2022; Vathi, 2015). For example, in Baldassar's (2001) pioneering study on the return visits of first- and second-generation Italians, the overwhelming 'hype' surrounding visits 'home' is linked to notions of family and obligation, and identity and belonging. As such, these studies have generated insights into complex attachments that can emerge due to experiences of being seen as a foreigner or rather of feeling at 'home'. Yet, less attention has been paid to the practices that diasporic visitors engage in outside of the context of family and ancestral ties (Anschütz & Mazzucato, 2022; Vathi, 2015), and the emotions and affects accompanying these. Here, it is particularly important to consider the temporal dimension as mobility experiences can transform through the life-course (Akom Ankobrey et al. 2021; Cheung et al., 2020) and in response to changing circumstances in the 'homeland' (Vathi, 2015).

Studies that consider experiences beyond the kinship framework tend to analyse these in the context of 'return' migration (e.g., see Phillips & Potter, 2009; Teerling, 2011) rather than short-term mobilities. VFR research does draw attention to other aspects of 'homeland' trips such as touristic consumption but mostly with the underlying aim to assess its potential economic impact (Janta et al., 2015). Relevant exceptions in the return mobilities literature include Wagner's (2019, 2017), Graf's (2017) and Yeh's (2014) studies on migrant-background youth's experiences of 'homeland' visits. They show that young people forge new spaces of belonging or translocal formations with peers based on common interests in leisure, rather than solely on familial ties, during such trips. Here, Wagner (2019) points out that this tends to happen in young people's emerging adulthood. Their annual visits to the 'homeland' from youth to adulthood enabled young people to consider it as a site for vacation leisure. Similarly, this paper focuses on the trips to Ghana that young Dutch-Ghanaians, belonging to the 'first' and 'second' generation, made during a stage in their lives in which they were considered old enough to navigate the country independently, and its changing urban leisure scene in particular.

Youth studies scholars explicitly deploy a temporal perspective in terms of the life-course, which has revealed the great importance of leisure practices in the ways in which young people create social belonging in their pathways to adulthood (Northcote, 2006; Robinson, 2009). These recurring practices afford an escape from adult surveillance and

explorative freedom. Here, the opportunity to engage with like-minded peers is particularly important for migrant-background youth as they are more likely to experience social exclusion in society. For example, Boogaarts (2008) shows that separate ethnic nightlife spaces offer Dutch-Turkish young people the space to reaffirm peer relationships with co-ethnics and enact community. Leisure pursuits can also carry important social implications such as romantic relationships (Northcote, 2006).

Youth literature, however, rarely analyses social practices associated with young people's pathways to adulthood in the context of their transnational lives. Transnational migration studies have shown that young people with a migration background participate in activities that extend beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (Mazzucato & van Geel, 2022). Harris et al. (2020) bring youth studies and transnational migration studies together by theorizing the intersection between youth transnational mobility and the domain of intimate life, including friendships and romantic relationships, which have received significantly less attention than labour market outcomes or career prospects (e.g., see King, 2018). Inspired by their work and recent research agendas more broadly (Cheung et al., 2020; Robertson et al., 2018; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018), this paper puts *youth mobility trajectories* (Mazzucato, 2015; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018) at the centre of analysis.

The notion of trajectories allows for an understanding of mobility as a process that unfolds rather than a linear move from one place to another. It captures young people's complex back-and-forth moves between the countries of 'origin' and residence, for short trips or longer stays. This temporal approach also helps to question linear trajectories in terms of youth (Cheung et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2020). Youth is not a defined stage in a pathway from childhood to adulthood but a continuous process of 'becoming', produced by vital life events such as independent trips. By embedding young people's trips in broader trajectories, the affects accompanying each move and life-phase can also be uncovered. In this paper, the notion of affect is understood as a practice of embodied meaning making that emerges through social encounters and events (Wetherell, 2012). Hence, foregrounding temporality (Baldassar, this issue) and affect provides deeper insight into the different meanings that 'homeland' visits can take on over time. Though not the focus of this study, increased access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) contributes to the changing nature of trips due to the new possibilities that virtual connectivity offers (Anschütz, 2022; Baldassar, this issue).

Using the 'hype' as a point of departure, this paper shows that leisure practices facilitated young people's ability to engage in their own independent transnational relationships with like-minded peers, as they entered into adulthood. Aside from diasporic friends, this group of peers includes young people who live in Ghana, consisting of same-generation family members such as cousins, and romantic partners. The affective nature of leisure enabled a degree of exploration within the context of intimate relationships and added normalcy to these. This shaped young people's way of relating to Ghana during a stage in their lives in which they increasingly claimed their independence.

METHODOLOGY

This study is part of the Mobility Trajectories of Young Lives project, which examines the impact of transnational mobility on the lives of young people. Between January 2018 and October 2019, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in The Hague (the Netherlands) and surroundings and during three trips to Ghana (2 months in total).

The sample consisted of 36 young people aged between 14 and 25 years old, who were either born in Ghana or both of their parents were.[1] Young people needed to have made at least one international move, including both migration and/or shorter trips. This study thus includes both 'first' (or 1.5) and 'second generation participants. Though not selection criteria, most participants identified as practicing Christians and lived in low-income neighbourhoods. Although they came from primarily working-class families, their 'foreign' levels of capital, and spending habits as leisure consumers in particular (see also Wagner, 2019), made them stand out as affluent individuals in the

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[1] In two cases (exceptions), participants had mothers who were born in a neighboring country.

Ghanaian context. While acknowledging migration and global disparities (Baldassar & Brandenhorst, 2021), some of young people's family members, including siblings, and other local peers, were also relatively privileged compared to the majority of Ghanaians. At the start of fieldwork, most participants attended secondary vocational education or universities of applied sciences. They were mainly recruited through snowball sampling, local Ghanaian-led organizations and foundations, churches, community events and a high school.

An important factor that helped me built rapport with participants was my position as the daughter of a Ghanaian migrant. It was for example common for young people to ask me about my personal connection to Ghana, which tended to break the ice when first meeting them. The fact that participants and I were relatively close in age or of similar age and that I was conducting fieldwork at 'home' (i.e., the Netherlands) also offered me a degree of social proximity. At the same time, my educational background and upbringing, among other things, emphasized social differences between me and many participants. Rather than framing my positionality in terms of the insider/outsider dichotomy, it proved to be more helpful to reflect on the social subtleties that simultaneously united and divided us (e.g., Reyes, 2020). The study received ethical approval from Maastricht University's Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms are employed for all participants referenced in the paper, and potentially identifying details have been removed to ensure anonymity.

Data were mainly collected through participant observation in significant locations such as cultural events, homes, churches, leisure sites and online settings, and through informal conversations and different type of interviews. The latter includes life-history interviews, thematic interviews and photo-elicitation interviews, which were conducted in Dutch, English or a mixture of both languages. Through the use of these methods, the 'hype' around mobility to Ghana emerged as an important theme in the research. In order to gain insight into young people's mobility trajectories, mobility mapping (Mazzucato, 2015; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018) was conducted with participants, which builds on a technique developed by demographers to capture life-events more precisely (Mazzucato et al., 2022). Mobility mapping involves the systematic collection of data on participants' moves in space and time by asking them questions indicated in an interview guide. Data are then entered into a grid and are visualized in a mobility trajectory map. In some cases, data collection occurred in a single interview while in other cases, it was done through conversations at various moments during the fieldwork period. Analytically, mobility mapping allowed me to situate young people's current trips within a history of mobility and elicit emotions and affects accompanying each move and life-phase. By following young people's trips to Ghana in real-time, I was able to observe the sensorial and emotional aspects surrounding the 'hype' including the affective practices that underpinned their (transnational) relationships. The triangulation of data revealed the importance of co-ethnic peers from the Netherlands, and Ghana-based same-generation relatives (i.e., cousins and siblings) and romantic partners during these trips.

Following fieldwork, I read and re-read fieldnotes and subsequently manually coded the empirical data to identify themes related to the multi-sited nature of young people's pathways to adulthood. The analysis mainly draws on the narratives of 14 female participants, including young people who were born in Ghana and the Netherlands and who visited Ghana in their late teens and/or early twenties. Below, I present three cases through vignettes that illustrate how leisure practices facilitated young people's ability to establish and renew relationships with (1) diasporic friends, (2) siblings and cousins from Ghana and (3) romantic partners from Ghana and affected their way of relating to Ghana. These cases have been selected because they illustrate the full diversity of the themes as observed across the sub-sample, and because I could accompany these participants on their trips to Ghana. The vignettes were developed based on fieldnotes and interviews from multiple occasions.

BUILDING INTIMATE TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH LEISURE PRACTICES

By following young people's affective leisure practices in Ghana, which characterizes the 'hype', this section presents three vignettes that illustrate how diasporic friends, and Ghana-based siblings and cousins and romantic partners affect young people's way of relating to Ghana during critical moments in their mobility trajectory, namely when they

are entering into adulthood. The first vignette shows that leisure practices enabled the physical co-presence of diasporic friends during 'homeland' trips, which fostered a sense of familiarity and emotional solidarity across time and space. The second vignette discusses how participants not only came to see Ghana in a new light but also their siblings and cousins from Ghana, who often took on the role of local 'guides' through the affective experience of participating in leisure together. Finally, the third vignette discusses how young people's involvement in leisure practices opened up new possibilities for exploring romantic connections in Ghana.

Diasporic friends

'We should all go together!' Not long before my trip to Ghana in December 2018, I was excitedly prompted by several participants, who would all be in Ghana in the same period, to get tickets to the Afrochella festival. Afrochella was widely promoted as a celebration of Africa's diverse cultures, music and entrepreneurs, and as 'Ghana's answer to Coachella', a famous annual music and arts festival held in the United States. The anticipation of the event invoked the feeling of 'going on a holiday' during a holiday.

As soon as I entered Afrochella's terrain, a large grass field in a stadium, by walking through a flowery gate bearing the sign 'Afrochella' at the top, I found myself surrounded by mostly black people, in different shades, wearing African-inspired outfits and speaking diverse European and Ghanaian languages, in different accents, colorful artworks, Barbie doll photo booths, food trucks and vendors; making the festival a meeting point for diasporic visitors. Not long after my arrival, I bumped into many participants, some of whom had come to the festival in small groups, and came to form one group. Loretta was among them. She was born in the Netherlands and strictly had to follow her parents' movements during the four previous trips she had made to Ghana but managed to escape her father's watchful eye that day: 'Ghana has a lot more to offer than I thought. I've never been to Afrochella … with friends before because I used to be stuck at home.' After having waited for hours in the hot sun, some of Loretta's, and other participants' favorite Afrobeats artists finally started performing. 'Where are my bogas [slang for Ghanaians living abroad] at?!', one of the artists shouted, which was followed by loud cheers. As soon as we heard the intro of 'Aben wo ha' a timeless classic that took many back to their childhoods, our bodies responded by synchronically imitating the signature shoulder movements from the famous music video. This visceral sensation provided a connection between diasporic peers visiting the 'homeland'.

The vignette above illustrates that young people's leisure practices during trips to Ghana gave rise to formations that were predominantly made up of diasporic peers, and in turn to 'new modes of being and feeling' in the country (Conradson & Latham, 2007, p. 235). It is within the context of the 'hype' around traveling to Ghana, reflected in the physical co-presence of many co-ethnic peers from the Netherlands, that participants mentioned that it felt 'very normal' to be in Ghana. This new reality made it possible for participants—who travelled together in some cases—to arrange meetings at leisure sites such as Afrochella and have chance-encounters there with Dutch–Ghanaian friends. Participants also celebrated festive moments together with them in the context of experiential leisure such as birthdays and even an engagement party (see Section 4.3). Unlike previous trips, stays in the country of 'origin' thus did not necessarily imply a drastic change from everyday life (e.g., see Baldassar, this issue 11–12).

Yet, despite the 'ordinary' nature of engaging in leisure with peers in the context of young people's lives, this activity generated distinctive affects in the Ghanaian context and hereby added a special dimension to diasporic friendships. Although it was still common for family members to impose constraints on young people's movements due to their

externally described position as 'children' (King, 2018), as reflected in the vignette, participants increasingly collectively explored sides of Ghana that they had been largely unfamiliar with. For example, like many other 'aesthetically pleasing' leisure sites, Afrochella had only been established in recent years and triggered a collective visceral sense of excitement among participants. While this shows the appeal of certain place-embedded features at particular stages in one's life (King, 2018, p. 9), it is also important to consider the histories of affective atmospheres (Wetherell, 2012). It used to be common for young people to face negative, stereotypical remarks based on their Ghanaian/African background in the Netherlands. Yet, they encountered a counter-narrative, based on so-called signs of 'modernity' (Fält, 2016) such as upscale and hip leisure spots, through their most-recent trips to Ghana and via social media, which they often readily embraced. This went along with engagement in spaces that were often inaccessible to the majority of Ghanaian residents due to the high prices and rather dominated by young diasporic visitors and upper-middle class Ghanaians at times (see also Wagner, 2019). Emma (19), who visited the country independently for the first time after having been on frequent family trips, was among this group:

> Bloombar [popular lounge bar in Accra] is covered with lights, it's new. It really gives you an American vibe. It was so fun with the two of us. Two ladies from Amsterdam later joined us … We [also] went to a restaurant in Cantonments [an affluent suburb in Accra]. So amazing but so expensive' Emma said, outraged.

Moreover, the global success of Azonto in particular, a dance craze that gained worldwide fame in 2011, had made it 'cool' to be African/Ghanaian and express this through the consumption of urban West-African music and dance styles (de Witte, 2014). Describing her time at Afrochella, the 'highlight' of her last trip, Loretta said:

> There are also festivals in the Netherlands of course but I'm really into … everything Afro. It was really cool to be at a festival where my type of people and music are central… Africanism was a central element; encouraging the Ghanaian diaspora worldwide.

The experience of enjoying music and moving the body together, in sync at times, reinforced an embodied sense of connection. This shows how a pattern of activity, leisure in this case, can become emotionalized at particular moments in time (Wetherell, 2012). Tabitha (23), who grew up in Ghana and had made five trips to the country since her move to the Netherlands, said:

> I don't get that excitement in the Netherlands. […]. You can relate to them. You can relate to the kind of dance. You can relate to the kind of music. You can relate to the kind of shouts. When there's music [playing] and they scream: 'eeeey'. she said laughingly.

As described in the vignette, artists at Afrochella invoked an imagined community by referring to the audience as *bogas* [Ghanaians living abroad]. This is perhaps not surprising considering the fact that the festival was founded by a group of young Ghanaian-Americans (Akhalbey, 2018). Hence, leisure experiences with diasporic peers contributed to the creation of normalcy as described earlier. This sensibility challenged binary understandings of belonging in terms of a 'here' and 'there' (Graf, 2017). As such, 'homeland' trips can accumulate individual diasporic visitors into formations that connect localized lifeworlds (Yeh, 2014).

While participants' engagement with diasporic friends had inspired many of their practices during trips to Ghana (Akom Ankobrey, 2022), the presence of Ghana-based peers cannot be overlooked. In fact, they became key figures in young people's mobility experiences as the next sectio ns will illustrate.

Same-generation relatives from Ghana

I was waiting for Rebecca (25) at an 'upmarket' outdoor café with wooden interior and several tele-visions mounted to the walls, located in an affluent neighborhood in Accra, when a car stopped close to the entrance. Rebecca stepped out of the car, after which her brother continued his journey to his workplace. When Rebecca came closer, I saw that she had a tired look on her face and bags underneath her eyes. After having given each other a hug, Rebecca told me that she had stayed up partying till early in the morning with her brother (Bennett) and woke up early again. This had become a routine since arriving in Ghana for her third independent trip.

While Rebecca was born and raised in the Netherlands by her parents, Bennett grew up in Ghana. Dur-ing the first three family trips she made to the country, Rebecca would see her brother but felt unable to build a close relationship with him. After being triggered by a desire to experience 'what the hype was all about', she traveled independently to Ghana at the age of 23 to explore Accra's leisure scene together with Bennett. Although she had protective parents, they allowed her to do so due to her brother's pres-ence. Knowing most of the venues and parties that had figured prominently in the videos and photos posted on social media by diasporic peers, Rebecca happily welcomed Bennett's role as her local 'guide' and grew closer to him in the process: 'I got to know my brother better. It was so nice to discover all the things he likes and what I like, and to see what we have in common. It became more normal [spending time together]'.

This vignette illustrates that participation in leisure practices enabled young people to bond in new ways with their siblings and/or cousins from Ghana during trips. Their earlier social engagements used to be mainly limited to kinship settings (Akom Ankobrey et al., 2021), sometimes in hometowns that lacked leisure facilities such as in Rebecca's case, but this changed when their same-generation relatives took on the role of 'local guides' in the country's urban leisure scene. For example, Rebecca felt her brother had shown her 'all the places' that contributed to the 'hype' including parties, luxury resorts and restaurants among other things, during her three independent trips to Ghana. 'It's just something you got to experience once', she stated. The fact that young relatives took their visiting family members under their wings made participants' parents feel more reassured that their children were looked after and safe. Same-generation relatives are therefore important actors during young people's 'homeland' trips, both in accessing 'freedom' and acting as 'protectors'. While Hannah (25) was born and raised in the Netherlands and had made six trips to Ghana, her eldest sister grew up in Ghana. She described the role of her sister during trips to the country as an adolescent in similar terms:

My sister brought us everywhere at an age when you are discovering yourself. When my sister left [due to her move abroad], we were not allowed to go out anymore. Ghana was seen as too dangerous. After that it was family, family all the time.

Although participants did not have to rely on their parents or other individuals from Ghana in order to navigate the leisure scene since the launch of Uber in Ghana in 2016, they nevertheless often made use of the opportunity to be driven around by trusted family members when meeting diasporic peers (including me) at leisure sites as Rebecca's brother did. During her third trip to Ghana with her mother, Mary (17), who grew up in the Netherlands, managed to meet her Dutch–Ghanaian boyfriend with the help of her Ghana-based sister, for example. Since Mary's family in Ghana disapproved of her having a boyfriend before marriage, her sister—and newfound 'partner in crime'—secretly

drove Mary and her boyfriend, who was staying in the same city with his family, to the recently opened shopping mall and back home again. Sibling support can thus play out in different ways across the life course (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021).

It was through affective leisure practices that participants became more aware of commonalities between them and their sibling and/or cousin in terms of interests, and often in turn came to see them in a new light. Hence, they were not merely guides, but also people they could have fun with in Ghana. Rebecca for example 'discovered' how much her brother liked to party during her most-recent trip, even more than she could 'handle' at times: 'When we would go out and I wanted to leave at 2 am, he wanted to stay till 5 am so we stayed … but it was still nice'. Similarly, Rachel (19), who was born in the Netherlands, learned during her fourth and most-recent trip to the country how 'fun' her cousins were when they danced like 'their lives depended on it' at a concert with Afrobeats artists.

Similar to the previous section, participants invoked an emerging sense of normalcy in relation to their experience of intimate relationships during trips to Ghana. Spending leisure time with her brother, for example, had become part of Rebecca's holiday routine. Generally, participants got more used to their young family members through these intense forms of socializing. For example, Kimberly (19) grew up in the Netherlands and knew her brother from family trips to Ghana, yet only established a solid relationship with him after having engaged in leisure, when she was in her late teens. 'It was only: "how are you? How's school?" That's it … It's normal to be together now. It seems like we're siblings. We laugh, listen to music and just have fun together'. In her eyes, leisure and exploration, which take on increasing importance in young people's pathway to adulthood (Northcote, 2006), served as a unifying factor: 'We're all still a bit young and in the prime of our lives so let's enjoy [going out together]'.

However, in a few cases their peers rather increasingly came to stand out as 'different' in the context of experiental leisure. For example, in contrast to his Dutch–Ghanaian stepsiblings, Priscilla's (19) stepbrother sat in a corner with a serious look on his face throughout the evening during a pool party. In a later conversation with Priscilla, who had made biannual trips to Ghana from a young age but only met her stepbrother for the first time during this particular trip, she commented that teenagers in Ghana are 'very different from them and more like the fifth wheel on the wagon'. Priscilla added that her step-sibling rarely went out and embarrassed himself by not knowing how to act at the party, an indicator of his perceived lack of cultural capital. Hence, local-based family peers did not necessarily perform the role of 'guides'; they were sometimes rather exposed to new spaces by their mobile diasporic relatives. More importantly, leisure practices not only unite, as most of the examples show, but can also reinforce distinctions (Boogaarts, 2008).

Romantic partners from Ghana

> After asking around for recommendations of nice restaurants where she could hold her 21st birthday party, Ama, who was still familiarizing herself with Accra's leisure scene, decided to go for a restaurant with a karaoke bar in the heart of the city. Her party brought together some of her friends from the Netherlands, who were also in Ghana at the time (including me), and two of her Ghanaian friends and admirers who she had met via Twitter. Ama was born in the Netherlands and had made four trips to Ghana with her family. Although Ama's parents only occasionally gave her permission to leave the house during previous family trips, she did vividly recall receiving a lot of attention from men on the streets as she grew older, which gave her a 'confidence boost': 'I just feel more attractive there'. Eager about the prospect of exploring Ghana independently and joining the 'hype' after having been constantly exposed by social media posts of diasporic peers enjoying leisure time in Ghana, Ama decided to move to the country for a 6-month internship. 'I think I'll feel more mature [in Ghana]. I can't wait for the Ama that I'll be when I return'. Ama said while fantasizing out loud about her journey.

In line with this emerging sense of freedom, Ama was single and felt 'ready to mingle'. That she did not lack any male attention became apparent during her birthday party. After some flirtatious interactions, one of Ama's admirers declared at the end of the evening that he had a crush on her. Meanwhile, her other fling had previously expressed his interest in wanting to marry her. Ama did not give in as she felt they were not the 'right' men for her and rather continued praying for her future husband. Months later, she had developed a new crush who she started going on dates with and was even willing to 'risk long-distance for'.

Participation in leisure practices enabled romantic encounters, both with existing as well as new contacts, and thereby often shaped participants' possible future life trajectories. Since many expressed a preference for dating Ghanaian-background men, including those from the diaspora as well as local Ghanaians, trips to Ghana offered the possibility to more intentionally explore the dating market (Wagner, 2017; Graf, 2017, p. 2721; Mazzucato et al., 2006). Ama, for example, got a 'confident boost' from all the attention and potential dating options: 'I was eleven, you know, and in a bit of an insecure stage, and was like [in high-pitched voice]: omg, everyone thinks I'm beautiful. You're also among your own people and black is into black, you know'. Though rarely discussed in terms of perceptions of the physical self, mobility can thus positively relate to the sense of confidence of migrant-background youth (van Geel & Mazzucato 2018). Some participants, however, responded differently to the attention. Esther, for example, mentioned not wanting to swim in the pools of the many hotels she visited to avoid it: 'They already look at you as if you're naked, let alone when you're half-naked. They would then approach you like they're hyenas'.

Flirting was one of the affective practices that took place in the leisure spaces (Wagner, 2019) that participants visited with diasporic friends and young family members from Ghana. This was for example reflected in the playful teasing and banter that Ama participated in with some of the male guests at her birthday party. Young people were also approached by strangers in flirtatious ways. For example, during her first independent trip to Ghana after having been on eight family trips, Jill was approached by a young man as she was dancing at a pool party. In the meantime, her brother kept a close eye on Jill and attempted to stop her from exchanging numbers with him. When I referred to the situation in a later conversation, she said while rolling her eyes: '… I immediately deleted it [the man's phone number] afterwards. I can think for myself'. Although these flirtatious interactions were rather fleeting, they fed into the notion of the 'homeland' as a place of fun and experimentation (Wagner, 2019).

In other cases, flirting resulted in dates and enabled a further degree of personal exploration, an ideal that is associated with emerging adulthood (Northcote, 2006). For example, during her 6-month stay in Ghana, Ama declined her two romantic interests as she sought to find a more suitable partner and started going on dates to places like hotel swimming pools with a young successful entrepreneur who appeared to have the 'whole package' in her eyes. Meeting new people in Ghana on her own terms, including potential partners, contributed to her sense of maturity; something she had hardly experienced during previous trips due to parental restrictions. Like Ama, Shirley had mostly stayed indoors during holidays in Ghana. During her trip to the country at the age of 19, she expressed the desire to experience a whirlwind holiday romance. She met her love interest at a dinner she attended with Dutch–Ghanaian friends at a luxury hotel in Accra. 'I like the way your language flows', said one of the Ghanaian male attendees who sat next to her with an amused smile as he listened to the conversation Shirley had in Dutch with her friend. Shirley eventually ended up going out with him.

Leisure practices not only enabled participants to establish new romantic connections but also to nurture ones that they had made virtually or during previous episodes in their mobility trajectory. They did so in a manner that came natural to them as young adults and pleasure-seeking individuals. Like Ama, Tabitha (23) explored Accra's nightlife scene with a Ghanaian young man, who she had met online: 'The person I was going with was the fun, outgoing type… I could just go anywhere I wanted to, go back any time I wanted to, and he would join me to take me around'. Similarly, during Faith's (19) first trip to Ghana after she had moved to the Netherlands at the age of 15, she spent as much time as possible with her former classmate and boyfriend, who she had not seen physically since she had left, while seeking the fun of leisure consumption. She felt 'bored staying in the family house' and was eager to familiarize herself

with Accra's leisure scene such as by going to the cinema. The few times I had met the couple during a trip to Ghana, her boyfriend appeared to be withdrawn, just like Faith, so participating in leisure also offered them the opportunity to enjoy each other's company without necessarily having to talk. These affective forms of engagement thus allowed participants to create normalcy in relationships with crushes they had met face-to-face for the first time (after a long time).

Young people's leisure experiences during trips to the country of 'origin' can have important social implications, especially for those seeking to follow conventional pathways to adulthood (Wagner, 2017). As practicing Christians, many participants considered marriage to be the ultimate goal of dating. In fact, the topic of marriage often came up in conversations with participants in the field. Ama, for example, actively prayed for her future husband as mentioned in the vignette and ended up considering entering a relationship with a Ghanaian man despite the large geographical distance. Another participant (Tina) followed the same practice, after which her former neighbour from Ghana (Richard) who she had not seen physically seen since her move to the Netherlands at the age of 12, reentered her life. 'This is where it all started'. Tina said with twinkling eyes while pointing at a restaurant where she had her first date with Richard during her second trip to Ghana years ago, as we were sitting on a bench in a shopping mall in Accra. A few days later, he proposed to Tina at a luxury hotel in the city in the company of Tina's Dutch–Ghanaian friends. Like Tina, participants became more mobile between the Netherlands and Ghana after they had established transnational love relationships and considered where to settle. Hence, romantic relationships can play crucial roles in mobility decisions (Harris et al., 2020, p. 7). This ongoing mobility can enable young people to achieve normative markers of adulthood such as marriage.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Using a mobility trajectories approach, this paper examined how participation in leisure practices during trips to Ghana impacts young people's intimate transnational relationships. This temporal perspective allows for an understanding of young people's experiences in relation to previous episodes in their mobility trajectories. During earlier trips to Ghana, their movements often remained limited to kinship contexts (Akom Ankobrey et al., 2021) and were largely controlled by adults. The mobility experiences analysed in this paper, which took place when young people were in their late teens and early twenties, show that participants expressed an emerging sense of independence, albeit in varying degrees, by engaging in affective leisure practices with peers. In fact, this activity represented their (temporal) move away from adult surveillance and family obligations, central features of pathways towards adulthood (Northcote, 2006). Moreover, young people did not rely on adults (Akom Ankobrey et al., 2021) but drew on previous connections they had made throughout their mobility trajectories, including with friends in the country of residence, and with same-generation family members and romantic partners in Ghana, facilitating their ability to establish and renew their own intimate transnational relationships. Some participants had lived extensive periods of time in Ghana during which they had laid a strong foundation for accessing peer networks, whereas others had nurtured peer relationships over the course of multiple trips, for example. These relationships are not static but take on different meanings over time and space (Akom Ankobrey, 2022). Finally, the trajectory approach brought attention to the changing landscape of urban Ghana, which opened up space for participation in leisure in the first place. Though spatial characteristics are important factors in shaping transnational ties, they have received little explicit attention in 'return' mobilities literature (Ogden & Mazzucato, 2021b; Vathi, 2015). This limitation is linked to the emphasis on essential ethnic identities, which tends to rely on the notion of the country of 'origin' as unchanging.

The focus on affect brought attention to the 'hype' around leisure practices during 'homeland' trips. This needs to be understood against the background of a broader trend towards rebranding 'Africa' (de Witte, 2014). While participants were often confronted with negative, stereotypical portrayals of Ghana/Africa, the global success of urban West African music and dance styles made it 'cool' to be African and express this in bodily ways. Additionally, their exposure to 'modern' leisure spots during visits to Ghana and prior to mobility (i.e., via social media) triggered an affective sense

of excitement that spread among groups of young people. This resulted in the collective orientation towards the consumption of urban West African popular culture and 'aesthetically pleasing' upscale spaces during trips to Ghana, and the shifting perception of the country as a leisure destination (see also Wagner, 2019) rather than a monolithic place of reconnecting with family and ethnic identity. The emotional and affective states accompanying mobility are thus relational (Conradson & Latham, 2007); they emerge through encounters with people and the environment. As such, the use of a mobility trajectories perspective enabled me to build on and contribute to an emerging body of literature that highlights the temporal and emotional dynamics in youth mobility (Cheung et al., 2020; Harris et al., 2020; van Geel & Mazzucato, 2018).

As intense forms of socializing, leisure practices enabled exploration and added a sense of normalcy to young people's intimate relationships. These were often based on belonging to the same life-cycle cohort and common interests (Teerling, 2011) rather than merely on primordial ethnonational or familial ties. The transnational nature of peer relationships, however, has been largely overlooked in the literature (Ogden & Mazzucato, 2021a). Yet, by bringing youth studies and 'return' mobilities in dialogue with each other, these findings show that peer practices significantly affect young people's mobility experiences, and hence their way of relating to Ghana.

Since diasporic visitors generally visited similar places and had similar temporalities (i.e., travelled during the Christmas holiday) (Graf, 2017; Wagner, 2019), it became more 'normal' for participants to have chance-encounters with Dutch–Ghanaian-background peers at leisure sites and arrange meetings in Ghana. This created a sense of familiarity and signals the need to recognize the interconnectedness between localities and people that young people can experience during 'homeland' visits (Graf, 2017). Furthermore, the vast presence of young diasporans beyond their own peer group and the vital and affective power of transnational youth cultural objects (Cheung, 2016, p. 250) fostered feelings of emotional solidarity. For example, the collective experience of doing the same dance moves to their favourite music and attending festivals together (Lulle et al., 2017) triggered a massive stimulation of the senses and emotions. This shows the importance of taking youth culture into account (Yeh, 2014) to gain a fuller picture of the affects that shape young people's independent relationships to their 'origin' country.

While family visits became less of a focal point during the trips that participants made as young adults, relationships with same-generation family members, cousins and siblings in this case, (re)gained importance. They often took on the role of local guide by helping participants navigate the urban leisure scene, which made young people's parents more reassured that their children were safe. This relates to Sala and Baldassar's (2017) finding that engaging with family in the 'homeland' can be a culturally appropriate way for young people to gain independence. Beyond their more instrumental role, participants also developed more friendship-like relationships with family peers through the affective experience of dancing together for example in the context of leisure consumption, making it feel increasingly normal to be around each other. The findings extend beyond the focus on the *maintenance* of family ties in the literature (e.g., see Janta et al., 2015) and provide insight into the practices that young people engage in that make relationships with certain family members *thrive* at particular moments in time. While some participants had struggled to establish connections with young family members during previous trips to Ghana, they came to see them in a new light through these intense forms of socializing. Hence, transnational relationships can acquire new meanings as relationships to the 'homeland' shift (Baldassar & Brandhorst, 2021).

Finally, leisure practices facilitated young people's ability to explore romantic connections in Ghana. They engaged in flirtatious behaviour with strangers (Wagner, 2019) but also met romantic interests, whom they knew virtually or from previous episodes in their mobility trajectory. Here, too, engaging in leisure enabled a sense of normalcy in the relationship. This was consequential in several cases; it resulted in long-distance relationships and enabled some to reach normative markers of adulthood such as marriage (see also Harris et al., 2020), turning Ghana into a potential place of (re)settlement. As such, mobility can impact intimate timelines and thus have important emotional and embodied consequences (Robertson, 2021).

The limitations of this paper open up fruitful avenues for future research. First, since the sub-sample in this paper consists of female participants, it is not possible to analyse gendered experiences. Further research could explore how gender shapes the ways in which young people built intimate relationships during 'homeland' trips, especially roman-

tics ones. Phillips and Potter (2009) for example found that sexual competition for men hindered British–Bajan female returnees' ability to forge friendships with local women. Second, this paper centres the experiences of young Dutch-Ghanaians visiting Ghana, leaving the perspectives of local peers largely unexamined. By giving greater attention to the latter, future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how power relations play out in intimate relationships between young diasporic visitors and local peers. Third, I have mainly focused on young people's offline experiences during visits, yet the examples in this paper hint to the importance of taking into account their online engagement prior to mobility. By paying closer attention to the latter, an important contribution can be made to emerging research on the impact of ICTs on the temporality of 'homeland' visits (see also Anschütz, 2022; Baldassar, this issue).

To conclude, by analysing the leisure practices and embodied experiences of young people as they enter into adulthood, the findings present a more variegated picture of relationships to the 'homeland' than dominant portrayals in the literature. In doing so, the paper aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how shifts from youth to adulthood intersect with mobility trajectories.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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