

Chapter 4

Contesting Gender Roles: ‘Left-Behind’ Migrant Spouses in Kumasi, Ghana

Ingmar Deenen, Lieke van der Zee and Lothar Smith

Introduction

In the last decade various studies have pointed out the macroeconomic impact of remittances, explaining that for many developing countries the volume of remittances has structurally surpassed official development aid (Addison 2005; OECD 2012). Thereby the argument is made that these remittances have positive effects, not only at a macroeconomic level, but also for villages and families in emigrants’ countries of origin (Castles and Miller 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2007). With regard to the influence on families it is certainly true that financial remittances have a direct impact on families’ livelihoods, potentially leading to lasting poverty reduction. At the local level, the support for (local) economies through investments in real estate and investment in small and medium enterprises, notably in urban locations, is also seen clearly (Smith 2007). Beyond these targeted allocations of remittances it may be argued that remittances often also have an overall economic multiplier effect, that is, the activities migrants or their local counterparts incite will, in turn, result in a whole range of other kinds of activities and services.

Although there are various, often interplaying arguments supporting any decision to migrate, for those coming from the Global South the difference in economic prospects in their own countries (and often also neighbouring countries) compared to those in the Global North remains the principal reason to migrate (IOM 2010). In Ghana, the empirical focus of this chapter, a so-called ‘culture of migration’ has arisen since the economic crisis of the 1980s, whereby nearly every (extended) family has one or more members living and working abroad (Adepoju 2005; Aryeteeh and Fosu 2008). This is in contrast with earlier decennia when only the cultural and economic elite would go abroad. This holds particularly for the wealthier southern part of the country, noting that beyond these transcontinental migration activities, others migrate within the country, or to neighbouring countries.

Whilst abroad, most Ghanaian migrants attempt to send remittances to family and friends in Ghana as a way to try and improve their prospects and livelihoods and, as already stated above, also to initiate economic activities to facilitate their return and a Ghana-based future. In some cases the effect of remittances may be empowering. This is the case, for instance, when these remittances clearly reduce poverty levels and/or ensure improved, self-sustainable livelihoods. Such impacts

have been pointed out in studies based on national surveys, such as the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) in Ghana (cf. Mazzucato et al. 2008). While the general benefit of migration for households, families or similar social units is justified, since overall livelihoods are improved through generally higher income levels, which also can be better sustained through a diversification of income sources, in addition, certain changes in the configuration of social hierarchies may arise out of revised roles of individual household members. Within households, the actual process of migration, and the resulting practice of remittance sending, can give rise to changes in social and economic arrangements. Particularly marriages and partnerships may be subject to fundamental changes, given the intertwining of the two partners' economic lives. In this, the institutional context may differ in the case of male partners migrating if compared to female partners leaving Ghana. In this chapter we focus on the evidence of such differences arising from emigration and remittance behaviour and its implications in order to critically assess the role of gender in transnational social spaces.

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted in Kumasi, Ghana.¹ Kumasi is the second-largest city of Ghana and the capital of the Ashanti Region. The Ashanti are well known amongst Ghana's ethnicities in terms of their level of participation in migration, both domestic and international oriented.² Three months of fieldwork resulted in interviews with 22 spouses of male migrants and 18 spouses³ of female migrants. This research made use of a mixed methods approach, that is, quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, in order to achieve a certain set of comparable responses on key themes explored. Furthermore, it also allowed for in-depth discussions with which ensure attention to an exploratory, partially retrospective and sensitive character of the research, the latter with special regard to migration, marriage and household affairs (Saunders et al. 2009). Interviews were held with the assistance of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Kumasi to enable respondents to respond in *Twi*, their home language, when so required, and also to create a level of trust.

This chapter is organized as follows: First, we discuss the underlying theoretical paradigms of the gender–migration–remittances nexus as related to this research. Then we give the background of the respondents, the so-called 'left-behind' spouses (both male and female), and discuss some of the implications of the decision to migrate of the migrant spouses. Having set the stage, the next sections dwell on the use of remittances and on the meaning of remittances, that is, how these influence the lives of the left-behind spouses, including a reconfiguration of roles along

1 This chapter is based on master's thesis research conducted in Kumasi, Ghana for Human Geography, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands (Deenen 2012; Van der Zee 2012).

2 The Ashanti have a matrilineal culture (Clark 1999). This may have particular influences, as an encompassing institutional context, on the pattern of remittances and the emerging division of tasks for both male and female spouses of migrants.

3 The term spouse denotes partners in relationships. Not all were married.

gender lines. In the conclusion we return to the question how remittances influence transnational ties for left-behind spouses, and discuss whether any major differences can be found in the impact of remittances on female and male spouses of migrants.

Understanding Gender, Migration and Remittances

Carling (2005, 9) notes that gender, migration and remittances interact in multiple and complex ways. With his emphasis on the multiplicity in the nature and direction of causality between gender and migration, Carling not only argues that the relationship can work both ways, but also that other factors such as age and class can have interacting roles. As will be elaborated later on, the concepts of gender, remittance behaviour, household roles and spousal relationships are strongly interlinked.

In stereotypically 'gendered' societies, 'women are assumed to be marginally more productive at household activities and raising children (childbearing, caring for the elderly, processing food crops and so forth)' (Faria and Sachside 2012, 99), which indicates a sense of care and nurture most strongly related to reproductive domains (Blackden and Wodon 2006). Meanwhile men are assumed to be the financial 'provider' and 'head of the household', which denotes a sense of masculinity and power. This stereotypically gendered pattern generally implies that in most nuclear families, the male spouse is expected to be the designated member to migrate whilst the female spouse remains at home to take care of the house and the children. In general, it could also be argued that (gendered) migration can create 'new' gendered contestations through the absence of the spouse, be this because stereotypical dichotomous gender relations become stronger – presumably more likely in the case of spousal male migration – or weaker in the case of spousal female migration.

The question then is whether migration and particularly remittances produce a stronger and/or revised gender-based task division, perhaps even reinvigorating certain traditional roles per gender that were diminishing, which might well be the case with male migration. Yet, what is the situation concerning migration of female spouses? In this study, we explore the influence of remittances on transnational gender relations between spouses, thereby focusing on perceptions, attitudes and actual behavioural changes of the spouse, male or female, who stays in the home country.

Social networks and gender are essential elements for understanding migration (Curran and Saguy 2001). Flows of remittances include more than currency. Bailey (2010) argues that research that simultaneously looks at the economic and social dimension of remitting will also help to produce insights in changes in social and cultural norms. To this end it is important to recognize that apart from money transfers, remittances also include gifts in kind or material expressions of familial obligations. Beyond these material forms of influence, migrants also impact on their families and communities in their countries of origin through social remittances

(Levitt and Nyberg-Sørensen 2004) defined as ‘the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending-country communities’ (Levitt 1998, 944). Social remittances are of importance because they are a form of cultural diffusion that links global economic and political changes to local level action and attitudes (Castles and Miller 2009). Wong (2006, 376) suggests that future research, including this study, ‘should look outside traditional models that emphasize remittances as economic transactions to examine remittances as a social practice, to deepen our understanding of the gender geographies of migration and transnationalism’. Culture and cultural changes are essential components for understanding the meaning given to individuals (gender), their actions (migration) and their relationships (network ties) (Curran and Saguy 2001).

While there have been studies linking intra-household gender roles to the decision whether to and where to migrate (De Jong 2000; Stark 1991; Taylor 1987) as well linking gender to the choice of remittance recipients and the way remittances are used (Robert 2010), there is a need to explore how a culture’s gendered lineage descent, matrilineal in the case of the Ashanti studied here, and hierarchical roles affect migration and consequent remittance behaviour (Wong 2006).

Transnational Families and Left-Behind Spouses

In our endeavour to find relatively comparable selections of male and female respondents who were spouses of migrants abroad we encountered the issue that in the case of male spouses of female migrants, their numbers were lower. It turned out that they were hard to find, which points to generally lower levels of participation of female migrants in married relationships. The result of this was a somewhat uneven population sample, as reflected by a generally higher level of economic status than what might be expected for Kumasi as a whole, but also in terms of educational attainment. Also when compared with the sample of female respondents clear differences could be discerned. Thus with regard to level of education, 72 per cent of all male respondents had completed tertiary education (as well as 50 per cent of their migrated spouses).⁴ The level of education of female respondents was much lower as 27 per cent had completed tertiary education, whilst for their spouses this percentage was substantially higher, at almost 60 per cent. These are numbers that express certain dissimilarities between households with male and female migrants in terms of their sociocultural context and economic background, but also the role of gender in who migrates, going beyond the argument of pooled decision-making, as set out in New Economics of Labour

4 The generally high level of educational attainment of both female migrants and their male spouses is primarily attributable to difficulties we encountered in finding suitable male respondents as spouses of (female) migrants. This resulted in a certain dependency on the social networks of staff of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Kumasi.

Migration thinking (Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark 1991; see also Castles and Miller 2009; Mazzucato and Kabki 2007). Another difference in the population sample was that the female respondents in this research were between 21 and 50 years old (with a mean of 35.8), while the male respondents varied from 22 to 73 years of age (with a mean of 45.3).

In terms of household composition the households of female respondents were relatively homogeneous, as 16 of the 22 (73 per cent) women had children under the age of 18 living in their household. Of the 18 male respondents, 13 (73 per cent) had children. Only six male respondents had children living at home. Of the seven male respondents with children living outside their household, these either lived with the migrated spouse (in two cases), with the sister of the migrated spouse (in three cases), or they were grown up and, thus, not living in the studied household (in two cases).

Of the 18 male respondents, seven (39 per cent) were living together with one or more (blood) relative(s): a cousin, a niece, parents or sibling(s). Thereby it could be discerned that the female residents in these households, generally, took over the role of the migrated spouse. This implies that for the male respondents their daily activities barely changed since the migration of their spouses. For four of the ten men who lived together with their spouses before migration, these male respondents did take over certain so-called traditional, female gender roles, such as washing, shopping and sometimes cooking, although they were assisted in this by their (female) children. In two other cases male respondents indicated to have a relatively equal and communicative relationship with their wives on how to deal with household chores and such. This situation was also induced by the lack of support from (blood) relatives.

It is striking, however, to notice that 5 of the 13 men with children arranged that these children lived outside their own house, which contrasted with the female respondents for whom this recurred once only, namely a respondent whose child was living with her sister because of certain financial problems. In general, however, female spouses took full responsibility for children when their male spouses migrated. The men, on the other hand, rarely took on the role of the female migrant spouse and would rather seek to see this role fulfilled by another female relative.

Motivation for Migration

As was mentioned before, in this research we focused on male and female spouses of international migrants. From our research it emerged that all but one (male, Togo) of the 40 migrated spouses were located in countries in the Global North,⁵ which somewhat contends demographic data on migration which asserts that 71 per cent of Ghanaian emigrants stay within West Africa (DRC 2007; Quartey 2009). For the

5 Given the high level of education of the migrants, their logical orientation was towards countries in which they could best apply their skills and thereby make the greatest financial gain or/and to further their education.

male sample this can be attributed to the relative prosperity of these households, which made it possible to invest in migration to the Global North. Regarding the female sample we can only hypothesize that households who were able to reside in cities such as Accra and Kumasi rather than in rural villages might have made certain economic progress and, hence, were in a position to adjust their migration aspirations to look beyond the borders of Ghana and West Africa. In terms of the locations of migrant spouses, it turned out that the United States was the most popular destination ($n=12$); this was followed by Italy ($n=9$), the United Kingdom ($n=7$) and Germany ($n=3$); the remaining migrants went to other destinations within Europe, whilst one migrated to New Zealand.

With regard to power relations and decision-making within the spousal relationship, respondents were asked about the motivation of their spouse to migrate, and whether they took part in the decision-making process. From our interviews it became clear that the motives to migrate were mainly economic in nature, as two out of three migrants had migrated for economic reasons. The other reason to leave Ghana was to further own education, although this was sometimes combined with economic motives as these migrants hoped to find a job in the country of migration after finishing their studies.

Two male and three female respondents were not able to provide a direct answer to the question on the spouse's motivation for migration, as in these cases their spouse had migrated before they had begun their relationship and, therefore, they had not been part of the decision-making process at the time. Those male respondents who lived together with their spouses before the emigration of the latter indicated that they had played a role in the decision of their wives to migrate. Of the female respondents, three women came to know their spouse after he had migrated (they met when he came back to Ghana for a visit). Of the remaining 18 women, 15 indicated that they had decided together with their partners that it was in their collective interest for him to migrate.

With regard to the actual choice of destination country, more than half of all male and female respondents indicated that they had made use of their transnational network. Thus, 12 spouses of female respondents (55 per cent) and 10 spouses of male respondents (56 per cent) stated that either they or their migrated spouse had a friend or family member living in the destination country, who was strategic in helping the migrant go abroad. One key issue for transnational relationships was the manner of migration, particularly whether or not the migrant spouse was able to gain legal status in the country of destination. In many ways this is a delicate issue (Schrover et al. 2008) and we were careful not to push this topic too much, also as this was not a core theme of the research. In broad terms, however, it emerged that most respondents were quite aware of the legal status of their migrant spouses. At the same time, the exact reasons that led to their migrant spouse attaining this status, and for what length of time this would be, were less known.

The Use of Remittances

With regard to the volume of remittances we found that our findings differed somewhat from the often suggested argument in remittance literature that female migrants remit higher proportions of their incomes and send these back home more frequently than male migrants (UN-INSTRAW 2007, 2008). Firstly, male Ghanaian migrants sent financial remittances not only to their spouse, but also to their mother, which implies institutional allegiances to both the household and marriage but also to the extended family, particularly in a matrilineal society. Secondly, of all 18 male respondents fewer than half (eight) received financial remittances from the female spouse. In two additional cases, other family members were known by male respondents to receive remittances sent by their spouses, whilst the spouses themselves did not receive any money. In mentioning this, however, we have to keep in mind that with the exception of one respondent who was not a professional but ran a small jeans shop on a local market, the others could all be characterized as having a high level of education and well-paid professions. Indeed, these respondents indicated that they earned enough money to maintain themselves and therefore did not need their partners' support for their daily needs. At the same time, their partner did help with the payment of their children's education, and also co-invested in houses and/or businesses. Thirdly, during our research it became clear that one of the cultural traits that male respondents readily offered as a rationale for their willingness to work hard was that they were Ashanti (see also Clark 1999). Beyond this ethnic identity male spouses were also expected to continue to take on the role of principal provider of income, being the so-called head of the household, albeit that their financial responsibilities also extended to their matrilineal family. Indeed, during the interviews several male respondents indicated that they did not want to become too dependent on the remittances sent by their spouse, as this might result in a certain loss of (self-)respect. To paraphrase one respondent: a man will feel responsible for his family, even when his wife and children migrate. Thus Peter⁶ has two young children (two and six years old) who remained with their mother when she migrated to the USA. Once or twice a year, his wife sends around €250 by bank transfer to him. Since Peter is the head of the family and feels that he should be able to take care of the family, a couple of times a year he sends back money in the order of €80 and €160 per instance. He states that he does this to keep up his status as a man who is perfectly able to take care of his family (interview, 10 April 2011).

Figure 4.1 shows the total percentage of respondents who received remittances, differentiated by gender.⁷ It shows that 19 women (86 per cent) received remittances

6 Note that all names in this chapter are pseudonyms, serving the purpose of protecting the respondent's identity and that of their migrant spouse.

7 With regard to all figures concerning remittances, the data covered the period following migration of the spouse. It must be noted that there is scope for memory bias with the retrospective data collected through the interviews.

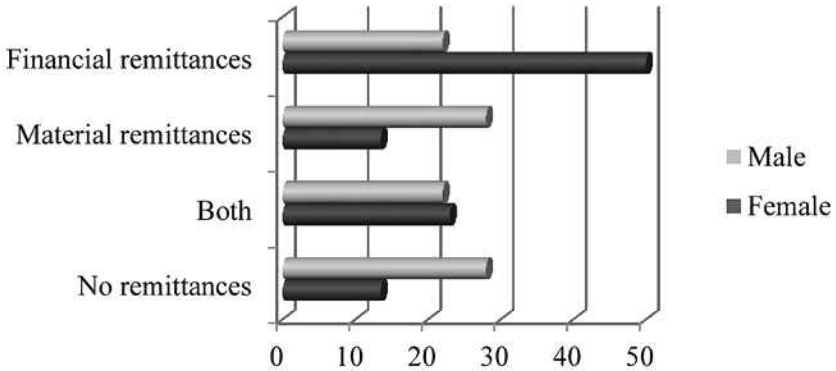


Figure 4.1 Receiving remittances (% of respondents)

Source: own fieldwork.

(goods and financial) compared to 13 men (72 per cent). This entails that three women (14 per cent) and five men (28 per cent) did not receive remittances whatsoever.

Zooming in on financial remittances we find that these are received by 73 per cent of the women (16 out of 22) but only by 44 per cent of the male respondents (8 out of 18). With regard to material remittances it is important to note that the type of material remittances that men and women receive may differ considerably. Some women received rather expensive products from their migrant spouses including laptops, TVs, a fridge or even a second-hand car. By contrast men often received much smaller (and cheaper) goods like clothes and personal presents. In fact, we did not know of any men who received expensive products.

Overall it can be concluded that for both genders, one in four respondents who received financial remittances received less than €50 per month from their migrant spouse. The majority of the female respondents (63 per cent) and one out of four male respondents received between €50 and €200 per month. Finally, two female respondents and four male respondents received over €200 every month. This means that whilst not all men received remittances of any kind, half of the men who did receive financial remittances actually received quite a lot, compared to what female respondents received. Once again, the link here can be made with the educational level of the female emigrants and the male respondents. Half of the female migrants completed tertiary education and were able to secure a good job abroad, making them less vulnerable to employment market fluctuations, as recent unemployment data in Europe is also showing (Khan et al. 2009). With their well-paid jobs they had the opportunity to send home quite large amounts of money. Indeed scholars like Jolly and Reeves (2005) argue that such migrated women may well experience a strong pressure from home to remit money. Whilst we found little evidence of such social pressure on better-paid female migrants from their male spouses, when going by the information provided by these male

spouses, the same respondents did relate of other family members and friends who continually pressured the same migrants to send them money. Thereby it was not known if, and when, their wives actually succumbed to such pressure, and how much they then would send.

More generally, most (24) respondents indicated that they did not know exactly to whom their spouse was remitting, although they knew of some individual recipients, usually relatives. More specifically, both male and female respondents clearly stated that whatever income was earned by the migrant spouse, and how they redistributed this through remittances, was the spouse's own business. Moreover, that they did not need to know the amounts, nor did they necessarily need to participate in decisions regarding the recipients of the spouse's remittances as long as the migrant spouse ensured that sufficient money was sent to maintain the conjugal family.

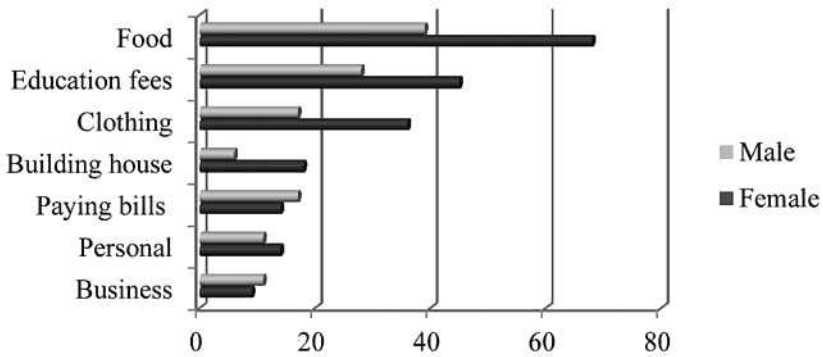


Figure 4.2 Purpose of remittances received (%)

Source: own fieldwork.

In Figure 4.2 we provide data that explains the relative share of all respondents who indicated that they spent remittances on a particular item. Thus the numbers do not express the distribution in terms of financial value of all remittances received per item.

Concerning the allocation of remittances for business investments, the two male and two female respondents involved expressed that they were not dependent on these remittances, but that they did receive a relatively large amount every month, which also allowed them to make certain investments in their businesses.

Table 4.1 Allocation of remittances

	Women (%)	Men (%)
Food	15 (68)	7 (39)
Education fees	10 (45)	5 (28)
Clothing	8 (36)	3 (17)
Building house	4 (18)	1 (6)
Paying bills (electricity, water, rent)	3 (14)	3 (17)
Personal	3 (14)	2 (11)
Business	2 (9)	2 (11)

Source: own fieldwork.

Changing (Gendered) Roles and Spousal Relations

Following the section in which we set out the actual level and kind of involvement in transnational exchanges through remittance sending, this section focuses on the significance of these remittances, that is, what do they mean for the so-called left-behind spouse? To understand this, we need to delve into the influence of remittances on the nature of transnational relationships, and whether the position of the so-called left-behind spouse changed following the spouse's migration.

The majority (more than 80 per cent) of the women who received financial remittances expressed that they felt quite dependent on the remittances. They stated that without them their life would be very hard, since it would be difficult to pay for their children's education, the upkeep of the household, unexpected expenditures or the maintenance of business (if applicable). It is striking that for this specific group of women all but one received remittances irregularly. Moreover, the amounts they received varied considerably from month to month. Dependency on migrants for income amongst the male respondents was much less prevalent, probably due to the fact that most of the men that who received remittances were (at the very least) already financially self-sufficient. Out of the three men that felt dependent on the remittances, only one man stated that the money he received came in irregularly. Finally, we found that relatively more men than women also received remittances from other sources, which might explain why few men felt dependent on their spouse's remittances. Four men and five women indicated that they also received remittances from other family members or friends living abroad.

When asked, one-third of the female respondents indicated that they felt that their role had changed since their spouse had migrated. They described various situations to identify these changes. In-depth discussions revealed more general changes. Below we note the most significant ones.

Two-thirds of the female respondents stated that their household chores and daily tasks had not changed much following the migration of their partners since these partners had rarely been involved in household chores prior to their migration. At the same time, these women indicated that they were now obliged to take on various tasks that had previously been part of their spouse's domain. This included securing additional income to cover periods during which no remittances were received, especially during the initial period after the spouse's migration. Another change the women mentioned as negative was that they were left with few options for sharing the caretaking of the children. Furthermore, the maintenance of the house also became their prime responsibility when in the past this had traditionally been the partner's sole responsibility. Added to this, the women now were in charge of allocating the household's finances and ensuring that school fees, medical bills, rent and dues at church were paid in time. Finally, and most importantly, many of the female respondents felt that they were shouldering all responsibilities by themselves, irrespective of the various telecommunication links with their spouses abroad. Most female respondents indicated that although their partners felt responsible for supporting their families financially, the geographical distance between them and their spouses much reduced their spouse's ability to be part of the household and support them emotionally. About half of the female respondents expressed that they were much busier than before with raising and taking care of their children. Some indicated that they had to take on the role of both mother and father, which at times was difficult and made them feel lonely. However a small minority of three other women felt more relaxed and free, being able to take their own decisions, than when their spouses were around, as they felt that their partners were rather demanding.

Of the 10 men who lived with their spouses before they migrated, six indicated that their role in the household had changed since their wives had left Ghana. One was a pensioner who only had to take care of himself. The others indicated that their daily tasks had changed quite significantly after their spouses' migration, as they had to assume tasks such as childcare, cooking and the general upkeep of the house. On the one hand they experienced this change as a logical effect. On the other hand they also experienced these extra tasks and responsibilities as a burden. Nevertheless most male respondents mentioned that they were able to make arrangements to ensure that the tasks of the migrated mother would be taken up by other females, and not by themselves. Thus some of the male respondents sent their children to live with a sister or a wife's sister (three cases). In two cases the male respondents even came to an agreement with their wives that their children should join their mother abroad, for instance because of better education opportunities for their children. On the whole, two-thirds of the male respondents lived with various relatives in the house, which meant that there were always adult females around who could be called upon to take care of the children and to do the cooking and the general upkeep of the house.

Since our interest included the changing attitudes and behaviour of the migrated spouses, we also inquired about this topic. However, respondents indicated that

they found it difficult to answer this question, arguing that in order to do so they would have to live with their spouses again so as to know what changes had taken place. An emotional connection may well remain strong via various means of communication, but to actually pinpoint changes in behaviour or lifestyle remains difficult from a distance and proved impossible for some of our respondents. This was an interesting observation as it somewhat contrasts with the common argument in transnationalism studies that continuity of relationships remains possible across large geographical divides caused by international migration.

Whilst we acknowledge that transnational relationships do exist and may even become more intense, respondents indicated that certain aspects of the marriage simply required more effort and proximity for a longer period of time in order to better understand these relationships and appreciate them more. Yet in many cases if the migrant spouse returned to Ghana at all after some time, this was usually for a few weeks or months at the most. Hence respondents felt that it was difficult to make firm statements about changes in attitude and behaviour of their migrant spouses based on such a limited period of time. Beyond the need for physical proximity to ascertain the changes in their migrant spouses and the implications of these for their marriages, respondents also pointed out that the frequency of contact by phone, by text messages, and other media, even when regular, did not necessarily guarantee the quality of exchange. Especially the women in this research found it difficult to define their spouse's situation in the destination country and could not always provide accurate sketches of the situation of their husbands abroad. In addition they often did not know their spouse's occupation and even less about the income their spouse earned. It must be said, however, that in some cases – particularly amongst female respondents – there also seemed to be a lack of incentive to communicate on such matters with their spouse, as they shrugged off the question. Thus they also found it difficult to make valid statements about this topic.

Keeping these research limitations in mind, we found the following: One-third of the female respondents stated that they did not think that their male spouses' norms and values, their views of life and their behaviours had changed since their migration. One-fifth of the women could not answer this question because they felt that their contacts with the spouses were too limited to give their opinions. The other 10 women (45 per cent) had noticed positive changes in their partners like them being less aggressive and more understanding and showing a caring attitude and behaviour. A striking example of this is Linda, a female respondent who indicated that she and her husband became a lot closer since he left. Before his migration they used to have many conflicts, where he would sometimes resort to physical abuse. Since his migration he has apologized for his behaviour on many occasions, and she feels he is treating her differently, generally showing much more appreciation for her. Half of the male respondents indicated that they felt that their spouses' behaviour had changed. Generally, the men felt that their spouses had become more assertive, which they attributed to them learning new things in the host country, and particularly gaining a wider perspective on the world

through living in another culture. These men felt that their spouses had changed their behaviour, but also, that this did not imply a strong shift in norms and values.

With regard to changing power relations within the household following the migration of a spouse, our findings indicate that just over half of the female respondents felt they had gained more power in decision-making concerning activities at the household level since the migration of their spouse (see also Figure 4.3). De Haas and Van Rooij (2010) argue that it is a misperception to see the accepting of the migrating partner's responsibilities, notably women taking up their partners' tasks, as a form of emancipation. In many cases these women have little choice in deciding whether to assume their partners' tasks, thereby becoming, by default, the so-called head of the household in the process. For a number of reasons this 'promotion' to shoulder tasks traditionally belonging to the other gender cannot, necessarily, be conceived as empowering. Firstly, only limited possibilities exist to contest who is the head of the household, not only because a continuity of authority and roles is possible through transnational exchanges between the spouses, but also because such a continuity may also be enforced by other household members, and/or by other parts of society. Furthermore, if there is any status gain particularly by female spouses of migrants, then this acquired status is merely temporary, it being contingent on the return of the (male) migrant spouse, who is quite likely to claim back this role when he returns to Ghana. Thus any increase in decision-making power and attendant responsibilities does not necessarily mean a permanent shift in empowerment.

In addition to empowerment, also stability in marriage was a topic that especially female respondents considered to be important. Whilst there was a general consensus amongst respondents that in a good marriage both partners should feel comfortable with the division of roles and responsibilities, various female respondents indicated that they were not comfortable with changes brought about by the migration of their partners. They actually considered the additional tasks they had to assume after the partner's migration as a burden rather than a gain in status and had only accepted these new tasks because they had no choice but to accept the new situation. Yet, ideally, they preferred to share these responsibilities with their spouses. Figure 4.3 shows that 86 per cent of the women not living with their migrated spouse were not happy with their current situation, in most cases because they missed certain contributions from the spouse such as his emotional support, his interest in sharing responsibilities, and him being the 'strong man' in the household and the father of their children.

One female respondent explained the social impact of her husband's absence as follows: 'Yes, I have more power to make decisions. But I have no choice; there is no one else to lead the household. It would have been better if my husband was around, so that we could share all the responsibilities' (interview with Grace, 3 May 2011).

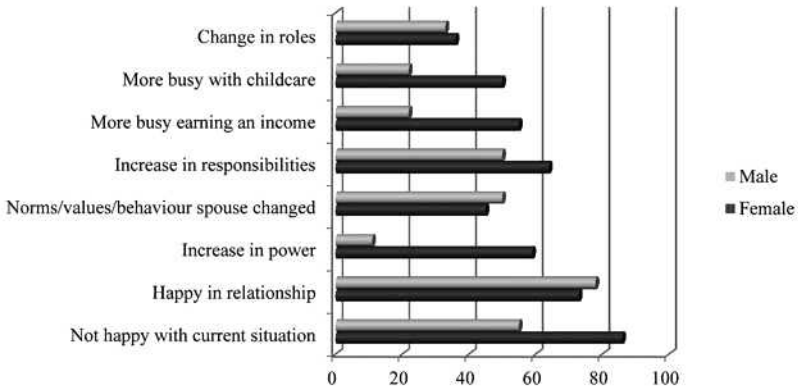


Figure 4.3 Changing gender roles and power relations (%)

Source: own fieldwork.

Another respondent, Sandra, expressed that she did not feel like she had gained power since her husband migrated:

No, I do not feel like I have more power. When my husband was around, I could ask him for money every day, if that was necessary, and spend it on purposes that I wanted. Now I receive money only once a month and I have to ask my husband first if I can use some of it. He wants to know what I spend the money on. (Interview with Sandra, 26 April 2011)

It is striking that only two male respondents expressed that they felt that they had gained more power since their wives had migrated. This seems to support the general argument that prior to their wives' migration male respondents were the principal decision-makers and heads of their household, and that nothing much changed after the migration. In fact, some of the well-educated male respondents indicated that they hoped that migration would help provide their wives with a broader perspective, and that it might assist in gaining equal partnership in their relationship. Other male respondents, however, held rather different views on the influence of the experience abroad on their wives' attitudes. Thus, Peter argues:

Sometimes the 'Western freedom' gets into the mind of the women, which can create problems for their marriages, since they are forgetting about the male culture in Ghana. It makes the men decide they should not bring their wife over. This also has a positive aspect, which is that the men think they are protecting the stability of their marriage. (Interview with John, 8 June 2011)

In line with the literature, we also found in our research that living in another culture, indeed, creates challenges for both female and male migrants regarding

gender roles in the destination country compared to the migrants' culture, even more so because all migrant spouses in this research had moved to the culturally different Global North. Notwithstanding the influence of cultural experiences through international migration, our findings also show that the influence of tertiary education (for male and female respondents) may have brought about different household forms and, as a consequence, certain adaptations to traditional gender roles in the Ashanti culture. Where this occurs, it seems to largely imply an empowerment of women.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter we gave specific attention to the impact of remittances on gender relationships between spouses. To this end, the position of spouses of migrants who had remained in the country of origin was studied. The aim of the study was to assess whether the general argumentation that stresses the benefits of migration through remittances were considered valid by the partners of the migrants, and to establish at what social costs to the so-called left-behind spouses such financial benefits were attained.

Regarding the overall pattern, we found that there was a marked difference in the scale and direction of remittances. Whilst most female spouses of migrants were recipients of remittances, for men the pattern was much more varied and included various kinds of economic behaviour in order to remain financially independent of their migrant wives, even to the extent of sending reverse remittances in order to protect their social status.

In terms of the dependency level of the Ghana-based spouses, we found that more than half of all female respondents considered themselves to be (highly) dependent on the remittances they received. For the male respondents this only held true for a small minority. Beyond the apparent notions of breadwinner *machismo*, this difference may also be explained by the fact that most male respondents receiving remittances were middle class or upper middle class, implying that the remittances were often not an absolute necessity for them.

The female respondents showed clear abilities and a need to adapt to their new situation. Most female spouses stated that they had experienced important changes in their daily activities concerning the division of roles within the household following the migration of their partner, which went well beyond the domestic tasks they had prior to the partner's migration. This increase in tasks also led to some dissatisfaction, as they felt psychologically unequipped to deal with this sudden increase in tasks and responsibilities. This, they felt, could not be compensated by the transnational communication they had with their migrant partners. By contrast, the majority of male respondents stated that their activities had barely changed after the spouses' migration. Barring a few exceptions, male respondents were generally able to limit the care tasks following the spouse's

emigration, by calling on their 'care chain' of female family members to join their households. Alternatively they arranged for their children to live somewhere else.

Generally, male and female respondents indicated that migration, and any redivision of roles following out of this, did produce more mutual respect for the other partner. Indeed, respondents stated how their own sense of respect for their migrated spouses came out of an understanding and appreciation of their situation, as in their phone calls their migrated spouses indicated that they felt quite burdened by the combination of hard work, crowded accommodation, problems of adjustment and regular feelings of loneliness.

Overall, it can be concluded that the social implications for spouses remaining in Ghana are different for males and females. Males seem to find it difficult to accept their new role of no longer being the primary breadwinner in the household. In fact, after their wives' migration they found, albeit to different extents, that they had to renegotiate the relative positions of themselves and their wives in general household decision-making processes. According to several male respondents this was particularly the case after their wives had lived abroad for a few years in societies with cultures different from their own. It seems that the combined experience of the left-behind male spouse and that of the female migrant increases the possibility for gender equality in the relationship. However, for female respondents, our observations suggest that both in terms of actual practice as well as in terms of their cultural and gendered position, the emigration of their partners is much less contested.

Whilst the exploratory character of this research has provided valuable insights in the particular position of the spouse who stays behind, we suggest that future research in this field could be broadened in two ways. The first is to expand the research in a geographical sense and to embark on a multi-sited research approach that would incorporate both spouses in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding based on the input from both partners regarding the meaning of marriage, gender roles, and the division of tasks in a transnational context (Mazzucato 2012). The second concerns a longitudinal research approach that would help incorporate a temporal dimension allowing researchers to track changes in transnational relationships over time, ideally in pre-, during and post-migration situations. This may assist in gaining insight into what reshuffling of responsibilities, tasks and identities takes place and ascertain whether migration creates temporarily or, rather, more permanently altered gendered relations.

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