Making neoliberal states of development: the Ghanaian diaspora and the politics of homelands

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Abstract. For impoverished African states the attraction of inward flows of capital is vital and migrants are one such source of finance. Some governments actively encourage this, which brings out tensions between national affiliation and more particularistic forms of identification. This paper examines this in the context of Ghana. Between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s there was large-scale out-migration from Ghana, creating what has been termed a ‘neo-diaspora’. The migrants have mainly settled in cities in Western Europe and North America where they have developed institutional networks linking them to other diasporic locations and to Ghana. These migrants have complex identities forged from multiple meetings in numerous places. Some of these are rooted in hometown, clan, and family attachments and the obligations this brings. The current government (in line with many developing countries) is making a major play to ‘harness’ the diaspora for political support and inward investment. Tensions are being played out about dual citizenship and whether the migrants’ economic commitments to Ghana are matched by rights as full citizens. The Ghana government has had to tread a careful path between attracting investment and garnering the right sort of political support, since people in the diaspora often have an ambivalent relationship to domestic politics. One of the vehicles through which the Ghanaian state seeks to square this is through encouraging hometown associations in various cities in the global North to fund development at the local level through various local–local partnerships. Hence, the nation, the national good, and development are being promoted through particularistic ethnic and locality-based organisations, which brings to light multiple and overlapping political communities.

Introduction
In his inaugural speech of January 2001, Ghanaian President John Kufuor made special mention of Ghanaians living outside Ghana. He said:

“I must acknowledge the contributions made by our compatriots who live outside the country…. Many of you do more than send money home, many of you have kept up keen interest in the affairs at home and some of you have even been part of the struggle of the past twenty years” (Kufuor, 2001).

His speech captures an emerging feature of African development in which migration has become a core strategy for many states. In Ghana, and Africa more generally, out-migration, as a response to political and economic turmoil, intensified from the 1970s to create what has been termed the ‘neo-diaspora’ (Koser, 2003). Whereas migrants were once viewed as unpatriotic, fleeing the country when they were needed most, the discourse has shifted to seeing migrants as very much part of the solution to underdevelopment (Ndofor-Tah, 2000; Ozden and Schiff, 2005). The current government’s targeting of the diaspora puts it ahead of most West African countries in this regard, though nowhere near those states, such as The Philippines, that have actively encouraged migration as a development strategy (Caglar, 2006; Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003; Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

But for the Ghanaians who have left Ghana over the past thirty years there is a very different set of motivations and responsibilities. Talking of African diasporas, MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga note, “what is new is that making use of kin overseas is becoming an essential strategy for survival and improving life for some populations”
This ‘essential strategy’ in response to underdevelopment and to the failure of the postcolonial state means that migrants face a paradox. While the Ghanaian state seeks external support in the name of national development, migrants have generally left due to poverty and political insecurity, such that they lack trust in the state’s ability to deliver development. Hence, migrants experience conflicting obligations in which they feel a tangible responsibility to family and community ‘back home’, yet are also attached to a national homeland through forms of patriotism. It is these multiple identifications besides, beneath, and beyond the nation, and the (occasional) conflict between them, that are the focus for this paper.

While much excellent work already exists on what Goldberg (1998) refers to as ‘extraterritorialised states’, in which the “nation-state includes as citizens those who live physically dispersed within the boundaries of many other states, but who remain socially, politically, culturally, and often economically part of the nation-state of their ancestors” (Basch et al, 1994, page 8), what I argue in this paper is that under a neoliberal regime attempts to encourage national development are in part via more particularistic affiliations such as hometown belonging, religion, or ethnic group. This produces a disaggregated understanding of the state as, in part, continually being remade by quotidian flows and institutions. States like Ghana are rescaled in complex ways and migrants are implicated in this process as individuals, as families, and as members of various group affiliations. Moreover, this imbrication of global neoliberalism, state-encouraged transnationalism, and personal trajectories complicates binary accounts of transnationalism and globalisation as being either from ‘above’ or from ‘below’.

I begin by examining the crisis of the African state and the pressures to neoliberalise which have been powerful forces in the migration story. I then look at how the Ghanaian state has attempted to balance its fiscal problems and democratic pressures through reengagement with its diaspora. What emerges is that most Ghanaians in Ghana and the diaspora ignore these efforts and are much more involved, and reliant upon, the small-scale institutions that link multiple locations in the diaspora with localities in Ghana. Next I examine the relationships between particularistic forms of attachment and national ones. In some senses, a multiethnic national identity exists within Ghana, which can accommodate both the particular and the general. However, from a developmental perspective the individuals and groups concerned are largely acting in ways that bypass the state and spread risk so as to ensure the well-being of kin rather than nation. From fieldwork in the UK and Ghana, I analyse the dynamics of what Mitchell (2001) terms ‘interstitial’ organisations at both ends of the migrant trajectory.

The developmental crisis in Africa and the making of the neoliberal state

In understanding the impetus for states to harness migration as a development engine we need an appreciation of their evolving political economy. The crisis of the state in Africa (Davidson, 1992) has long roots. While critical scholars (Rodney, 1972) cited colonialism as having engendered unworkable states, it is necessary to look at the political institutions existing prior to colonialism since these shape the possibilities of modern states and traces of them are found in today’s governance regimes. This is not, however, to argue that ‘primordial’ values and institutions undermine modern stateness (Hyden, 1983), but rather to show that contemporary political forms are not produced by eradication in some teleological sense, particularly

(1) There have been two phases of fieldwork. The first examined hometown associations in the UK and the Kwaahu region of Ghana. Subsequently, I broadened the research to examine lateral connections within the diaspora and more recognisably political activity.
the institutions of local governance which link people to their ‘hometown’. It is crucial, however, to understand the changing roles of these institutions and the meanings which participants invest in them.

In the area of Ghana in which I have been working, prior to formal colonisation there were well-organised city-states, with a federated empire (Davidson, 1991). Organisation was through a hierarchy of chieftancies, which stretched down to the village level. These localised institutions were responsible for land allocation and local development, as well as conflict resolution. Inheritance was matrilineal, with belonging to a locality traced through the mother’s line, which is important as one’s ‘hometown’ is central to many migrants’ sense of belonging. The colonial period was extensive, dynamic and had contradictory effects (Pieterse and Parekh, 1995), but it set in train new rural–urban and rural–rural migration flows and institutionalised chieftancy as a form of rule within the state, even as it denied citizenship to many. Mamdani (1996) describes this as the ‘bifurcated state’ since urban areas were governed by a facade of liberal citizenship and rural ones through customary authority.

At this time, hometown associations began to form, which served to help migrants arriving in the fast-growing cities to settle in and link them back to the ‘traditional authorities’ in their home communities (Englund, 2001; Honey and Okafor, 1998). Overall, this ‘divide and rule’ policy politicised ethnic belonging and fragmented colonial societies into competing polities which would not threaten the fragile colonial state. In terms of our story of contemporary migration, this sets up multiple political spaces, each with its own set of obligations. It left multiple ethnic and locality-based affiliations cemented by a range of largely male-dominated institutions as well as weak local government and a centralised state seeking to manage narrowly specialised and externally oriented economies.

Since independence, but especially from the mid-1970s, these tensions between centralisation and fragmentation became impossible to reconcile. Economic downturns, fiscal mismanagement, and the enlargement and politicisation of the civil service projected states like Ghana into deep fiscal crises (Hutchful, 1989). It was in the mid-1970s that a steady outflow of skilled and unskilled labour began, creating the neo-diaspora. I use the term ‘diaspora’ to emphasise the fact that, even if outright compulsion was not used, most of these migrants had little choice but to migrate given the pressures of underdevelopment. This means that experiences of both leaving and reception are crucial in explaining how diasporic communities operate and relate to their ‘home’ countries (Guarnizo et al, 2003). For Ghanaians, even within the last thirty years, there have been times when political persecution has added to economic hardship. Of particular relevance to this paper is the period in the early 1980s when a coup d’etat put in place a left-populist military regime leading to a rise in the out-migration of political opposition (Kraus, 1987), who in turn formed the diasporic political lobby which President Kufuor acknowledged in his speech at the start of the paper.

The impetus to migrate was deepened by austerity of the structural adjustment programmes led by Bretton Woods from the 1980s (Mohan et al, 2000). Harvey (2003) argues that these have seen a return to ‘accumulation by dispossession’ as commodity extraction and neomercantilist policies hold sway. Part of the neoliberalising of the African state involved enforcement of fiscal rigour and attracting inward investment. Most critical studies of the neoliberal state in Africa take a very external view, with the Washington institutions simply exporting and imposing a series of polices (Bayart, 1993; Beckman, 1992). While conditionality has been, and remains, a major issue in donor–state relations (Stewart and Wang, 2003), it is important to see neoliberal polities constructed in two other ways (Peck, 2001; Peck and Tickell, 2002).
The first way is relational insofar as political restructuring occurs across and between countries (Jessop, 2002). Rather than simply seeing the multilateral lenders, like the World Bank, imposing political change under the 'good governance' agenda, international processes can be equally important, which see the entwining of state agendas. For example, the National Health Service in the UK has been increasingly marketised over the past twenty years. This has increased the out-migration of UK health workers and the importing of cheaper ones from the global South, who are faced by even more financially squeezed and demoralised health systems in their home countries. The in-migration not only staves off a crisis in this flagship service sector, but has deleterious effects on the health systems of African source countries. In this way, the neoliberal restructuring of both state systems is implicated in this shift (Mackintosh, 2006) and reminds us that states are continually being made and remade through extranational flows and that we need to see states and transnational communities as “mutually constituting” (Schein, 1998).

The second way of complicating the processes of neoliberal policy formation follows Mitchell (2001), who argues for a focus on “hegemonic formation at the micro-level... the increasing scope and power of interstitial voluntary organizations located between the state and society” (page 166, italics in original) in which “the general effect of the rise of these shadow state voluntary institutions was to help entrench the original economic policies of neo-liberalism in a hegemonic and recursive process” (page 167; see also Elyachar, 2002). Mitchell analyses a Chinese voluntary organisation’s role in standing in for the local state in Vancouver in the wake of a freeing up of immigration regulations for wealthy Chinese. In turn, this forces us to move beyond unitary accounts of the state and look at how states are rescaling under neoliberalism. Most studies of this rescaling have focused on urban governance in the developed world (eg Jessop, 2002; MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999), but there is a growing literature on the role of civil society and the new localism in development (McIlwaine, 1998; Mohan, 2002; Mohan and Stokke, 2000) whereby self-help organisations, often funded through state aid budgets, come to stand in for service provision at the local level.

For this reason, the growth of migrant self-help organisations is not coincidental; arising not because the technology of globalisation makes such activity easier (Portes, 1997), but because the pressures of neoliberalism at and across scales make such activity necessary. This role of migrant organisations has been overlooked in many critical development studies (Caglar, 2006). As Trager (2001, page 8) notes in examining Nigerian hometown associations, “Even now, despite an increasing interest in development circles in community-based, local, grassroots development, there has been little attention paid to the role of those from a community but not currently residing in it.” As we have seen, the state in Africa has lurched from crisis to crisis and become increasingly illegitimate in the eyes of ordinary citizens. As it retreats from more areas of social life, ordinary people increasingly operate in “multiple, often interdependent socio-political and cultural spaces and groups” (Von Lieres, 1999, page 146). This leads Chikezie (2005, page 2) to argue that migrant organisations are part of this broader effort of Africans “constructing their own state”. As we shall see, this analysis is partly true, because in the case of Ghana the state is also very much encouraging these forms of organisation. The activities of the sending state and of these community-based organisations serve to normalise a particular reading of development, which is founded on entrepreneurialism and a self-help, charitable ethos.
The transnational politics of the Ghanaian state

The Ghanaian state’s efforts to harness migrants’ resources for national development follow many of the strategies identified by Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003). First, is bureaucratic reform as policy makers realise the importance of migrants, including special units within foreign ministries. Second, are investment policies geared to making it easier to remit finances. Third, are political rights, including dual citizenship and the right to vote from abroad. Fourth, are state services abroad, such as networks of diplomatic missions. Fifth, and potentially woven through all of these, are symbolic politics (Basch et al, 1994) as part of promoting national culture abroad. What becomes evident in the Ghanaian case is that migrants either are unaware of or ignore these efforts, despite some useful debates among political activists both in the diaspora and in Ghana about the relationship between economic and political engagement with respect to Ghana’s development. This finding reflects an important warning from Guarnizo et al (2003) concerning the dependent variable—namely, the focus by researchers on transnational engagement by migrants, from which they deduce that all migrants are thus engaged. Rather, they argue that methodologically we should identify the extent to which migrants are actively engaged in transnational activities and then assess the impact of such activities. (2) My research suggests that most migrants engage in much more everyday interactions with their families and communities back in Ghana, although they maintain an attachment to the nation through forms of symbolic patriotism.

Ghana’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (Republic of Ghana, 2003)—the policy document through which major lenders and donors organise their aid—mentions the diaspora as a source of development resources, and remittances are calculated to be the third biggest foreign exchange earner after cocoa and gold (Anarfi et al, 2003). In terms of attracting diasporic investment, the most concerted effort was the Homecoming Summit in 2001 organised by the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre. The goals were to develop strategies and to identify the means to tap the acquired capacities of the diaspora, which included but went beyond their financial power (Manuh and Asante, 2004). As the Minister of Finance declared:

“May I humbly invite Ghanaians overseas to use the natural advantage they have over their home based countrymen such as proximity and access to the latest technology, foreign exchange, reliable export markets and partners with know-how to begin to make direct investment into our economy” (Osafo-Maafo, 2001).

The three-day summit attracted around 1000 Non-Resident Ghanaians (NRGs), and a five-point action plan emerged. The NRGs identified a range of constraints centring on ensuring the stability of governance and the trustworthiness of employers, reducing administrative barriers to land acquisition and importation, and matching political rights with economic investment. The process stalled somewhat over the past five years but an investment summit for the diaspora was held in March 2007 to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of Ghana’s independence. It is hard to judge whether this event and the other changes have made a tangible difference to inward investment. Certainly, debate among diaspora groups shows real concerns about corruption and bureaucratic graft, making investment too risky, based on experiences of trying to do business in Ghana. This also explains why migrants prefer nonstate routes for transferring resources to Ghana (Chikezie, 2005).

(2) Their survey of Central American migrants in the USA suggested that around one third were actively engaged in regular and institutionalised transnational ‘political’ activity.
The majority of concerns for NRGs and the most concerted area of Ghana government policy has been around dual citizenship rights. There are two elements: one is dual citizenship provisions eventually put in place in 2002 (Act 591, Republic of Ghana, 2002) and the other pertains to voting in national elections under the Representation of Peoples Amendment Bill (ROPAB), which was passed in 2006 to become the Representation of the Peoples (Amendment) Act (Act 699, Republic of Ghana, 2006). The uptake of dual citizenship has been very low, which is put down to the limited benefits it offers. The ROPAB was more hotly debated among the diaspora, but it is not clear how wide support for it is. As one commentator states, “My guess is that lots (the majority) of diasporans do not care about voting” (Bonna, 2005). The lobbying from the diaspora was largely organised by the Diaspora Vote Committee under the rallying cry of *Yensosos Yesaasa Ni*—“The land belongs to all of us”. Their rationale is for full political rights to match their economic contributions, which raised important questions about how the two are related in the context of ‘extraterritorialised’ states.

This debate over taxation and representation brought to the fore the tension between explicitly national development and obligations to family and community in Ghana. By investing in a range of things, the pro-vote migrants argued that they create various multipliers. For example, “The direct remittances to the families of the Diaspora to pay school fees, housing, food and health-care are the monies that the Government does not have to spend” (Boateng, 2005). My research suggests that most remittances do not fund investment, but the counterargument that they simply fuel conspicuous consumption equally does not hold water as education, in particular, is heavily dependent on remittances. In terms of development, those opposed to the diaspora voting argue that migrants contribute to well-being only selectively by helping family through remittances, but do not contribute to national development as they would if they were taxpayers. They argue that migrants expect political representation, but escape the other duties incumbent upon full citizens such as conscription, and their remittances fuel inequality. Here, development is seen as a public good tied to a redistributive state rather than as a private action, which benefits families and may create multipliers and trickle-down.

Political parties have also been keen to tap the diaspora. Since 1992 Ghana has been a multiparty democracy following more or less unbroken military rule for twenty years. The ruling party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), has been in power for five years, is broadly pro-market, and was, in part, formed through disgruntled opponents of the previous government in the diaspora and so has the best developed networks in a number of West European countries and North America. All chapters were involved in lobbying during the elections at the end of 2004. Although getting data on offshore party finances is difficult, interviews and web discussion undoubtedly show that this occurs. A key strand of the NPP’s charm offensive on NRGs has been the active role played by diplomatic missions. As Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003) noted, cultural activities are part of maintaining contact with the diaspora and inculcating a sense of nationhood. The preceding discussion suggests that much of the activity organised by the Ghanaian government in Ghana has been rather low key and piecemeal. Certainly, either interviews in Ghana showed a complete lack of knowledge of these efforts to encourage the diaspora or interview respondents who represented small organisations reported that the government left them alone and did nothing much to encourage them. This stands in stark contrast to the network of high commissions that have been promoting the activities of hometown associations and more general Ghanaian organisations in the centres of overseas migration. News reports on the web show that in the UK, for example, the High Commissioner or his deputy regularly attends the meetings of Ghanaian associations. The High Commission also organises
annual events in London to disseminate information on changing laws in Ghana around things like VAT and dual citizenship.

As a result of neoliberal conditionality, states in Africa, and elsewhere, are being pressured to be financially sustainable and so seek creative ways of enhancing inflows of capital (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2003). However, many of these states are sufficiently fragile that they cannot open up the political process. The evidence from Ghana suggests that sending states and the political parties currently in power are trying to manage fiscal and legitimacy crises by seeking investment and political support, while at the same time delimiting the influence of migrants. These differing agendas have resulted in a tension over economic involvement and political rights. However, the level of engagement by the diaspora in these activities is limited and most people prefer to engage in a wide range of everyday connections to homes.

**Cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and multiple belongings**

So far I have discussed how the Ghanaian state has sought to capture migrants’ economic resources while delimiting their political inclusion. Returning to Mitchell’s work on the micropolitics of neoliberal hegemony, we can read the encouragement of offshore civil society organisations in the shape of hometown associations, churches, and the like as a way of boosting local development in much the same way as international development NGOs were encouraged in the late 1980s and 1990s. These not only provide much needed services and infrastructure that the state has been unable to provide, but are nonthreatening politically since few questions are raised domestically around the direction of international and national policy. Such processes echo Mamdani’s (1996) ideas of the ‘bifurcated state’, insofar as the promotion of ‘customary’ rule is a way of fragmenting society into multiple, local polities unable to challenge the power of the central state. But, in the lived experience of the migrants, these transfers through family and community organisations are the most meaningful routes with which to negotiate the uncertainties of mobility, honour various obligations, and connect with their homes. It is to these multiple political communities and their interconnections that I now turn.

**Grassroots cosmopolitanism and understanding multiplicity**

In exploring the politics of multiplicity (Massey, 2005) I draw on the idea of grassroots cosmopolitanism. This is not a normative and elite conception of cosmopolitanism (Brennan, 2001; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002), but based on a more sociological analysis of peoples in motion and the politicocultural resources they use and create (Beck, 2004; Hall, 2002; Robbins, 1998). This idea of being politically and culturally involved in multiple ways at different scales has also emerged, in part, from concerns with patriotism. Rather than an exclusive patriotism centred around loyalty to one’s nation-state, recent debate argues that it is possible to have nonexclusive and ‘cooler’ loyalties (Turner, 2002). Appiah (1998) has argued for a ‘cosmopolitan patriotism’.

“We cosmopolitans can be patriots, loving our homelands (not only the states where we were born but the states where we grew up, the states where we live); our loyalty to humankind—so vast, so abstract, a unity—does not deprive us of the capacity to care for lives nearer by…. It is because humans live best on a smaller scale that we should defend not just the state, but the county, the town, the street, the business, the craft, the profession, the family, as communities, as circles among the many circles narrower than the human horizon, that are appropriate spheres of moral concern” (pages 95 and 97, emphasis in original).
Here, migrants can have multiple loyalties to different political communities operating across different territories and scales, though maintaining patriotism shows the importance of national identification. While the ‘we’ and ‘can’ in this quote reveal Appiah’s normative desires, his thesis provides an analytical frame by focusing on what Clifford (1997) terms “non-absolutist forms of citizenship”; that is, the tendency for migrants to operate within more than one space of citizenship simultaneously. Appiah clearly implies that we gain meaning and identify with many different social institutions, which he believes is important due to a communitarian urge to live at a ‘smaller scale’. While his model usefully suggests multiple belongings, he places excessive emphasis on spatial proximity as the basis for ethical concern (Barnett, 2005).

In a similar vein, Erskine (2000; 2002) evokes multiple political communities in her notion of ‘embedded cosmopolitanism’, but she does not follow the communitarian line that such communities work best in localised settings. Rather, political community can be multiple, but need not be localised.

“Instead of evoking an image of concentric circles of morally constitutive communities (nation, state, regional union of states) this idea of community summons the figure of a web of intersecting and overlapping morally relevant ties” (2002, page 474).

Erskine’s simile of the web enables us to analyse political community without equating such communities with well-defined and nested political spaces. Instead, we are given a picture of political community still centred on a system of states, but crisscrossed by many other morally and politically meaningful communities, which may reinforce or subvert the nation-state. From an operational perspective, these forms of community mobilisation are differentially realised depending upon political and organisational capacities (Al-Ali et al, 2001; Caglar, 2006). Crucially, the identities and capacities that make up these forms of political activity are not internal to a given community, in terms of some ethnocentric origins, but relational in the sense that organisational processes and the wider political economy coconstitute one another. Crucially, as I have already argued, the disposition of the recipient state and the sending state towards migrant activity is critical in determining how active and effective such organisations can be (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003).

**Binational belonging and welfare provision**

Multiple national affiliations were clearly visible amongst Ghanaian migrants in the UK, where there is a sense of being minimally binational and belonging to two polities with obligations that straddle both.

“My husband has moved there now. I was supposed to have gone with him but I worry about the kids and I don’t want to move out 100%, I want 50/50 there and here” (‘Alice’, May 2004).

“Therefore we live here and we live there. For instance, I spoke to my sister about an hour ago and she was telling me that they’re a bit hard up and if I could send something and I said you know I always send, but give me time and I will send you something” (‘Patrick’, June 2004).

Such multiple affiliations are lived pressures, with most people—especially women—enacting their multiple attachments in quite low-key ways through this ethic of long-distance care for family and kin (see also Werbner, 2000). However, migrants may experience quasi-citizenship in two states. They are never really part of either state, but in a liminal political space and never really getting protection or rights anywhere. It is this liminality that explains their sometime antipathy towards their home state, which as we have seen in the case of Ghana seeks to capture their resources whilst denying them full citizenship. As a response they seek the security of alternative forms of
citizenship in other political spaces, not all of which are territorialis ed within the logic of the nation-state. Hence, clan, and hometown affiliations are part of a response to the inability of the state to confer full rights or even the minimum of social protection. And the Ghanaian political parties know this, but realise that any inflow of resources is de facto good for them so they play up this flexible citizenship (Ong, 1993). Hence, migrants are denied full political citizenship while being made to feel as if the nation-state cares for them through discourses of multicultural patriotism and the types of events organised by the High Commission in London.

The flip side of the same coin is that this multiple citizenship is part of a strategy for self-governance in an environment of uncertainty and risk (Beck, 2004). As historically weak (or nonexistent) welfare states, further undermined by neoliberal rollback, withdraw from welfare support people are urged, or forced, to rely on a range of individuals and groups. Some have argued that migrant activity ‘at home’ is a way of investing in physical and social capital for times of infirmity or retirement (Arhinful, 2001). Building houses, supporting younger kin, and gaining ‘respect’ locally are viewed as resources to be cashed in when migrants can no longer work, but where the state lacks any meaningful social security and the market means (such as private pensions) are also lacking (Clark, 1999).

For the Ghanaians in London and Milton Keynes, the main obligation was to support family and to a lesser extent friends at home. In many families, obligations were extended over generations particularly in cases where a single son was educated using all the resources of a family on the basis that they will support their parents, siblings, and crucially the education of nephews and nieces. All the older migrants are in the process of constructing homes back in Ghana, but usually in Accra rather than in their hometown.

“Most of us have got it in mind that one day, we’ll be going home, and therefore we’re building houses. We are sending money for the house to be built for us. We live in an extended family. The family doesn’t stop at your wife and your children. It goes beyond that and therefore most of us, like in my family, if they are able, will live in a big house” (‘Grace’, Milton Keynes).

As we saw earlier, this form of investment can excite resentment as it is oriented not to public goods for Ghanaian society, but rather to the private use of the family. Such activity fuels real-estate prices and tends to deepen inequalities between migrant and nonmigrant families (Ozden and Schiff, 2005). It also represents an effective form of tax avoidance insofar as migrants do not pay tax in Ghana, yet can own property whose value tends to increase steadily.

Grace’s comments also hint at a contested obligation to allow members of the extended family to reside in these homes. Respondents in the UK often cited the incessant demands from family and clan back in Ghana as onerous and as ignoring the very real hardships they have had to endure in terms of low incomes, racism, and general insecurity.

“How can you request this sort of money when you are leading this sort of life you know, so we said oh no you are taking us for granted you think that the money is just lying in the street so we said no” (‘Elizabeth’, Milton Keynes).

“[D]id you ask me where am I going to get it from? Am I OK? Have I eaten? Have I clothed myself but you just phone me, hi how are you are you all right? Oh it’s only I need about £100 you didn’t even ask me do you have it. They think England is pot of gold you’ve been there everything is easy as soon as you walk in money is everywhere” (‘Mary’, Milton Keynes).
Clark (1999, page 81) observes that Akan kin groups, of which those from Kwahu are part, “still honour blood kinship while feverishly renegotiating its obligations”. Migrants never reneged on their obligations, even if this meant foregoing investment in their own well-being in the UK.

Central to hometown identity is memorialisation. Obligations towards home are bound up in death and celebration of the longevity of the kin group (Geschiere, 2005; Lentz, 1994; van der Geest, 1997). Well-organised funerals in the hometown are a crucial part of sustaining this connection and claiming a sense of roots. The activities of Ghanaian organisations in the UK were often spoken of as ‘welfare’, but on further investigation this usually meant aiding members at times of bereavement. In Milton Keynes, for example, the Association of Ghanaians in Milton Keynes originally intended to provide mutual support to the bereaved but not to make financial contributions. However, this was rebuffed by the membership and the leaders were forced to back down, which indicates the centrality of funerals to the activities of many of these migrant associations.

Organisational life, alternative citizenship, and community well-being

I have already noted the importance of organisations for diasporic communities (Arthur, 2000; Itzigsohn, 2000; Tololoyan, 2000). The commonest are based on religious, hometown, and other group affinities. Religious organisations— for West Africans this is mainly church networks (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga, 2000)—are central to maintaining transnational communities and enabling sociality. Hometown organisations, which link the ancestral town or birthplace of migrants (Barkan et al, 1991; Caglar, 2006; Levitt, 2001) to an organisation in their place of resettlement, are largely welfare and development oriented (Honey and Okafor, 1998; McNulty and Lawrence, 1996; Orozco, 2003) and show that group connections to home can be particularistic (Englund, 2001) as well as strongly politicised in terms of challenging the homeland state (Landolt et al, 1999; Woods, 1994). However, they usually take up less confrontational and low-key political roles including being a shadow state, as bulwarks against state power, and as brokers between state and local society (Barkan et al, 1991; Lentz, 1994).

These dispersed networks also ‘meet’ and stay attached to home and others in the diaspora through electronic communication (Portes et al, 1999; Szerszynski and Urry, 2002). The double attachments can be reconciled by connecting through virtual means like international magazines and websites. However, as Urry (2004) and Amit and Rapport (2002) stress, community can rarely be maintained as an abstract and ascribed phenomenon, but requires active maintenance through ‘copresent’ interaction. It is here that apparently ‘nonpolitical’ events like fashion shows, festivals, and parties bring people together to both celebrate and transform their shared belongings.

In major cities such as London, New York, and Amsterdam there are large numbers of hometown and ethnic associations. For example, the Ghana Union in London has 95 institutional members and around 400 individual members and the National Council of Ghanaian Associations in the US has 13 affiliates in the New York area. Crosscutting these are ethnic organisations, such as the Asanteman Council of North America representing 10 groups of Asante people. Smaller national organisations also exist such as the Association of Ghanaians in Milton Keynes, and web news reports show similar organisations in Oslo, Seoul, New Zealand, Qatar, and Italy.

The organisations are quite formalised, with a management structure, regular meetings, and a portfolio of activities. Office holders are largely elites, with core members being men, educated to senior school or above, and are from either
professional or entrepreneurial backgrounds. Women are present as representatives of women's subcommittees, usually attending to welfare issues and/or where custom demanded as queenmothers.

While the hometown denotes the ancestral home, so that even if one had never lived there one's allegiance was to it, there is a generational dynamic since migration is often multisteppe with some migrants leaving Ghana from a major city, such as Accra, and never having lived in the hometown. For example, one UK respondent described himself as 'not typical' since he did not feel the need to be part of Ghanaian society as his parents moved around and he sees his community as Christian and not necessarily Ghanaian. He said, “my link is with the people not the [home] town” (‘Kwesi’, Milton Keynes). He also saw the move to Milton Keynes as breaking from the Ghanaian community in London, where he felt there was much gossiping and people are identified through their clan. He said, “London is very close to Ghanaian culture in terms of expectations as people tend to behave more like Ghanaians in London than they do in Milton Keynes.” Others echoed this need to get away from the ‘Ghana crowd’, dominated as it they see it by ‘the clans’. However, given that these respondents had not lived in Ghana for any of their adult life and hardly visited, one has to question the assertion that London-based Ghanaian communities are inward looking and just ‘like Ghana’. While not disrespecting the London Ghanaians, Kwesi clearly distances himself socially and culturally from them and sees his Christian cosmopolitanism (Appiah, 2006) as preferable to certain communal ‘traditions’.

Religious life is central to enabling and cementing transnational Ghanaian communities. In London, for example, there are a number of Ghanaian churches, some of which have clerical representatives from Ghana in permanent residence. These churches function as the regular hubs of social networks in a way that the hometown and alumni organisations fail to do. Many more women are active in the church than these other forms of organisation and churches also become the focus for large-scale mobilisation of funds, either for running (or even building) the churches or for more charitable activity towards Ghana.

Most of the activities of the hometown association involve public goods and tend to fill the gap either never filled by the state or vacated by it as a result of neoliberal adjustment (Barkan et al, 1991). The vast majority of the activities are infrastructure related, including road building, hospital upgrading, construction of school buildings, sinking of boreholes, or market construction. In very few cases were there projects that sought to raise productivity, something which Latin American hometown associations seem more willing to engage in (Orozco, 2003).

In terms of belonging to the hometowns of Kwahu, distinction was made between ‘citizens’ and ‘noncitizens’, although this was not always clear-cut. Belonging to the hometown is an ancestral connection through the matrilineal line so that people who had left the town or were descendents of people from there were eligible for recognition, but being active greatly helped this cause. Migrants who helped the town were termed ‘patriots’.

“there are many people who are patriotic and assist greatly in development projects” (Chief of Mpraeso citizens in Accra).

“Some are patriotic and love to see the development of their town with the intention that one day they will come back home. Some also do that to prevent future embarrassment when they happen to come home with friends” (Chairman of Adukrom development committee).
It is interesting that activities were often framed in a moral code of ‘embarrassment’ or ‘disgrace’ for having an underdeveloped hometown. As Goldberg (1998, page 173) notes, “Conflicts over projects a hometown organization will support...are central to ongoing processes for claiming community membership and altering the services and infrastructure—and accompanying status—of the home-community one claims membership to.” Citizenship, in this case, could also refer to those who moved to the town but were not ‘from it’. But as a form of citizenship most people remain subjects of the chief rather than rights-bearing citizens and are often compelled to give and contribute (see also Masaki, 2004).

The final issue is around the funding of projects and what this tells us about community membership, and the rights and obligations this confers. Funding for projects in Ghana comes from local sources, migrants in Ghana, and those abroad, whether through churches, hometown associations, or alumni. In a very few cases, funding came from local government, NGOs, or foreign governments. Tracking where people do contribute to public goods and understanding why are useful ways of gauging what people feel to be meaningful and legitimate political communities (Roitman, 2005). As we have seen, few see the state as legitimate or trustworthy despite having a sense of patriotism.

The local and Ghana-based residents were urged to pay levies and/or contribute to communal labour for projects. Levies were raised at funerals or annual harvests. For the poorer local residents, communal labour was their only means to contribute and failure to do so was subject to various forms of public sanction, including being reprimanded by the chief, having your own funeral celebrations delayed, and even being taken to court under bye laws passed by local government, although the latter had never happened in any of the cases I examined. Such moral pressure is captured in the often-repeated saying that ‘Every town has a Mensah’, which is somewhat akin to the idea that ‘there’s a bad apple in every barrel’. This reveals an interesting contrast between the formal channels of citizenship that migrants criticise for either being unhelpful or mired in corruption and these preferred forms of engagement where obligation and scrutiny are closely observed.

However, while failure to deliver on one’s obligations to the community was subject to various moral sanctions, these were lacking for migrants. While migrants were, in general, supposed to pay less than local residents, it was also acknowledged that migrants were likely to be wealthier than people staying put and so could afford to pay more. Although this differential ability to pay was quite formally established, it was acknowledged that migrants were exempt from any sanction for nonpayment.

“[W]e do not impose a quota sum of money on the people abroad to contribute. We do not know their conditions abroad and so cannot force anything on them” (assembly man of Adukrom).

Migrants appear freer to choose how they relate to this particular ‘home’, and in terms of citizenship at this level are able to enjoy the benefits of being of the hometown even if they do not contribute financially.

Conclusion
In this paper I have examined the ways in which the Ghanaian state is seeking to capture migrants’ resources by appealing to both their national patriotism and their more particularistic affiliations. I have also examined how different and overlapping political communities are structured and relate to one another. By doing this, I wanted to contribute to those debates challenging the zero-sum and normative logic which pits transnationalism against nationalism.
By focusing on the diasporic public sphere and the range of institutional and organisational practices within it, I hope to have nuanced our understanding of ‘national’ development. Just because multilocal, globalised, or extraterritorialised political activity takes place this does not mean that the territorial logic of the state has to be abandoned. Rather, I would argue that it leads us to profoundly question a unitary understanding of the state (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002; Schein, 1998) but also highlights state-building as an ongoing and emergent process (Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000). In this respect, the nation, the national good, and development are being promoted through particularistic ethnic and locality-based organisations, which brings to light multiple and overlapping homelands and citizenships.

But in terms of new forms of transnational politics, we need to be circumspect and avoid Hardt and Negri’s (2000) ridiculously optimistic assertion that migrants are the new pioneers of anticapitalism. The diaspora politics I have been looking at normalises the inequality of the global economy while also seeking to carve out a livelihood for families and individuals. These transnational civil society networks are mobilised around the family and more place-based affinities so that they do not operate strongly as a bulwark against the overbearing state in either the UK or Ghana. Indeed, as we have seen, they are ideal as a benign form of civil society, which fills in for public provisioning without placing political pressure on the state. However, it needs restating that these organisations are essentially elite-based and so have little incentive to challenge the status quo.

Finally, in terms of a wider politics, questions of obligation and responsibility are also altered by a focus on diaspora politics. It produces a very different take on the ethics and geography of development in which ‘our’ responsibility to distant others is not simply through charitable giving, but through hospitality to those migrants at the heart of our societies. In turn, this links to wider policy on immigration since evidence suggests that migrants who have formal citizenship rights are more willing and able to support activities ‘back home’.

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