



# Transnational mobility and the changing form and functioning of African family set-ups

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## Abstract

Cities of Africa are now places of transit lifestyles associated with the in-and outflow of formal wedged workers, creating new socio-demographic spaces that reshape the way families are structured and the relations therein. This paper sets out to examine how the quest for better wedges by working parents, alongside other factors, has altered the form and functioning of African families. A historical perspective is given on the traditions and values that lie beneath African family dynamics, for purposes of illustrating how gender roles and societal expectations on parenting and socialisation of children have been gradually reconfigured by urban trans-migratory lifestyles. The concept of transnational parenthood is applied as a reference to permanent and temporary work-related movement across borders while maintaining familial ties with children and other relatives back home. The socio-economic consequences of transnational parenthood are analysed together with the implications for immigration policy and planning in Africa, using literature and interview data generated from mobile professionals in Kampala city, the capital of Uganda.

**Key words:** transnational parenthood, mobility, cities, African family

## A historical perspective on African family dynamics

In Africa, sustained functioning of the family is essential to societal and individual well-being (Botha and Booysen, 2013), which makes it critical to advance the study on how families were relating and structured in the past in comparison with our times of transit lifestyles. African families are conventionally ritualised and tightly bonded by kinship ties with large groups of economically interdependent individuals. Marriage for instance, was not a mere agreement between two consenting individuals but a socially-determined contract between two kinship groups –that of the bride and groom –for purposes of laying a foundation for future collaboration (Gutkind, 1962; Little, 1956; O’Kelly, 1960; Parker, 1952; Middleton, 1960). To strengthen this contract –at least between husband and wife –a form of ‘payment’ known as bride price was supposed to be given by the groom’s family to that of the bride (Tambiah, 1989; Quisumbing and John, 2003; Anderson, 2007; Edlund and Nils-Petter, 2006). This was all done through a ritual known as the ‘introduction ceremony’, where the extended family, friends and neighbors of either families were obliged to participate as witnesses and contribute gifts in form of domestic animals, food crops, land extra. In return, the newlyweds were to manage their marital affairs in ways that are set by the traditional African sites of belonging and self-identity that included

kinship, clan and tribal entities as well as the larger community.

African couples were expected to have an unlimited number of children, whose virtue would be shaped using a utilitarian approach –in the sense that both family and community members had an input into the teaching and enforcing of traditional norms and gender roles that largely emphasised harmonious co-existence and respect for communal relationships (Metz and Gaie, 2010; Adeyemi and Adeyinka, 2003). The key methods of transmitting such moral values to children were symbols, local languages, mentors and associating with elder relatives (Guglielmino, et al., 1995; Nekhwevha, 1999; Gray, et al., 2004; Paciotti, et al., 2005). Delineations between family and community were blurred since both social locations were taken as sources of competent social actors for transmitting permissible standards of playing, living and learning amongst children. It is through familial-communal relations that children in Africa were supposed to cumulatively become oriented towards the basic principles of human-to-human interaction with parents in the lead. The rewards of individual and group-based conformity to such principles were emphasised through active teaching, material incentives and coercive compliance until adulthood.

However, familial-community learning was gradually complimented by western education systems (Nekhwevha, 1999; Alidou, 2003). This brought with itself a new agent of socialisation known as schooling and another group of social actors called teachers. It became the responsibility of children and parents to learn foreign mediums of instruction, especially languages such as French and English (White, 1996; Akkari, 2004). Schooling added a new layer of gender roles, where parents had to choose who takes children to and back from school as well as the domestic care that is needed to support their educational aspirations. Balancing these gender roles (child rearing and schooling) did and still does lay the weight of its success largely on mothers as the traditional care givers as compared to fathers (Milkie and Pia, 1999; Sullivan and Suzan, 2002). The social network for children too widened as it had to include fellow students as a process of mutual and controlled learning to meet the

desired educational outcomes (Villegas, et al., 2002; Desforges and Alberto, 2003). This means that although history has a tendency to characterise the introduction of western education as a form of colonialism in Africa, the rapid circulation of classroom teaching and boarding schools in particular can be understood as the starting point of parenting from a distance due to a transnational force.

To reinforce the point, Therborn (2004) argues that colonialism is one form of transnational processes where Africa should not only be seen as a recipient and victim but also a contributor and role-player in mixing domestic traditions with western means of running a family. This makes even more sense when we consider the fact that colonialism introduced a form of transnational labour migration, which on the side of Africans manifested itself in form of slave trade whereas the whites travelled to the continent as explorers, missionaries or colonial administrators. Therefore the surge of transnational mobility in labour terms is not recent in Africa but rather a historical phenomenon that needs interdisciplinary investigation and interpretations before analysing its effects on the continent, and family setups in particular.

### **The changing form and functioning of the African family**

The African family is still one of the most salient features of society as a central institution for learning and transmitting traditional values and gender roles. However, transnationalism, which is manifested by the growing presence of multinational organisations, transit work lifestyles, inter-racial and inter-ethnic social groups, has had glaring alterations in the form and functioning of the African family set-up and relations. This is not only in regards to size, as espoused by scholarly works on the influence of transnational family planning programmes, but also composition, residential set up, gender power relations and adaptation to economic uncertainty. It is also important to note that the drivers and signifiers of change in African family set-ups are many times interrelated and therefore give rise to intertwined processes of

transforming traditional customs, values and societal expectations.

### *Family sizes and composition*

Labour migration, economic stress and urbanisation have collectively impacted on family sizes, although the numerical wish of having as many children as possible has not completely lost its prominence in the African society. To illustrate the point, Uganda is one of the countries that have always had a fertility rate that is considerably higher at a global scale, currently rated at 6.2 according to the National Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS, 2011). On the outlook, this may mean that families in Uganda have not drastically changed much in size, especially in regards to the number of children borne by a couple, despite the increased awareness about family planning methods.

It may also allude to the fact that women, who are usually the targeted recipients of family planning programmes in Africa, usually drop out of such programmes due to husbands and elderly males in their communities who find family planning a fight against the basic principles of reproduction within marriage, as prescribed by African customs and religion (Harries et al. 2009; Hasna, 2003). Therefore although the African family is actively involved in the global process of transnational family planning programmes, with the associated birth control and population policies, its traditional norms and the patriarchal nature of its society, are still to a recognisable extent against massive fertility control. And this has largely turned out to be a disabler for women in making decisions about birth control and child spacing, hence the stagnation in fertility rates.

Conversely, urban-rural contrasts in family sizes have emerged due to interrelated socio-economic factors. For instance, child bearing processes, mainly sexual intercourse, are not at all times targeted at having children in African urban settings. Rather economic stresses associated with low wages and unemployment incline many women to use sex, marriage and membership to a given family to generate incomes that can meet basic needs. Inversely, it prompts men to exploit women's economic vulnerability by paying for sex and marriage (Dodoo et al. 2007). The implication here

is that although sex has traditionally been perceived as a right for married people to produce children as a family; this phenomenon has been partly altered by ongoing urbanisation that is occurring alongside deteriorating economic circumstances. Labour and other drivers of migration too, within and outside African cities, have continued to reduce the frequency of contact with sexual partners, thereby resulting into fewer children (Brockhoff and Yang, 1994; Foster, 2000; Adepoju, 2004; Baldwin-Edwards, 2006; Ratha and Shaw, 2007). Therefore women's ability in Africa to have not less than six (6) children may not have changed but translating such fertility potential into a large family size may continue to be constrained by a combination of intertwined factors including the cumulative consumption of family planning information, economic stressors and labour migration, with special reference to the urban context.

Family composition in Africa is not only characterised by variations that are related to one's sex at birth, as found out by Garenne (2009), but also those which are brought about by trans-ethnic mobility and bonding. For instance, a typical African family used to comprise of one ethnicity or tribe as the key classical element for social bonding. However, interethnic dynamics, especially at neighbourhood level in urban areas, have made families in Africa become multi-tribal and subsequently multi-cultural, even in linguistic terms. This has been mainly attributed to migrant ethnic communities who come to city centers to start or look for jobs and end up marrying from or living with people from other tribes (Amin, 2005; Edwards et al. 2003; Holland et al. 2007). This not only builds social capital for the migrants in cities but also forces them to assimilate to and sometimes impose their cultural norms on the recipient communities on an individual-to-individual basis. The implication is that trans-ethnic mobility is a process that contributes to reconfiguring the composition of African families.

Transnational mobility too has given rise to interracial couples and families in Africa. This is part of the broader global phenomenon where an increasing volume of Africans move from one country to another, create new socio-demographic spaces and are themselves reshaped in the process through marital

and workplace connections (Luke, 2003; Van Dijk et al. 2001). Today, it is no longer seldom in cities like Kampala to see natives having intimate and marital relationships with Asians, Arabs and whites as well as migrants from fellow African countries, for example Nigeria, Southern Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. However, this is not to imply that inter-racial couples have not met objections to their relationships amongst members of kin or the general public. As Fernandez (2010) argues from his Cuban study, inter-racial couples in Africa too have quickly understood that they are a dent to tradition and therefore find ways of cementing the bond, by for example bearing children who then become an avenue for winning the moral support of relatives. Therefore, racial mixing that used not to be deeply embedded in African family systems, has become an acceptable but also a contested global reality on the continent.

#### *Household types and residential dwellings*

In a traditional setting, fathers assume the headship of a household as women take on the domestic chores including child nurturing. However, new types of household set ups have and may continue emerging. The main ones include those that are female-headed and child-headed. The feminisation of household headship in Africa has been gradual and largely attributed to both income and non-income causes of poverty (Chant, 2008). The income-centered factors mainly include the absence of a male provider and unemployment, whereas the non-income causes are related to migration, civil wars and the desire by some women to be free from male-perpetuated forms of gender-based violence. On the other hand, the emergence of child-headed households has been linked to HIV orphaning, abuse or negligence as well as homelessness that are exhibited by the salient existence of street children and families, especially in urban centers (Ennew, 2003; Young and Ansell, 2003; Donald and Clacherty, 2005; Meintjes et al. 2010).

This means that the circumstances surrounding the changes in household types are demographic on the outlook but inherently driven by adaptation processes to changing socio-economic conditions.

Such socio-economic factors are mainly related to marginalisation, psychosocial support, individual well-being and economic resilience (Thurman et al. 2006; Greeff, 2013). These factors further explain why the primary forms of household types (male-headed, female-headed and child-headed) have given rise to secondary ones including: i) male-headed but female-maintained households; ii) youth-headed but parent-maintained households; and iii) transnational households, which are sometimes headed by relatives but financially sustained by parents working abroad. The differentials in residential and household set ups mean that the use of the concept of household headship requires deeper understanding of the relationship set and sub-sets amongst the household members identified and the economic contributions made by each individual, within and outside the residential home.

#### *Gender power relations and new forms of domesticity*

Although the migration of labour may appear to be an individual choice, the actual processes of subscribing to a transit family lifestyle is contained in tensions and compromises that involve alterations in the way gender norms shape domesticity (Wong, 2013; McDowell, 2013). Traditional constructs of domestic care relationships and obligations are contested as women in both low and high-skilled employment search for work opportunities overseas. Women have been presented with competing and contradictory societal expectations, as they seek to excel in both career and the up-bringing of children, whilst the care demands from spouses and the extended family. These multiple expectations, according to Spar (2013), have exposed women to contrasting professional and personal lifestyles. Part of the choices available for women is a transit lifestyle, where seeking lucrative jobs across borders is combined with the struggle to preserve the traditional standards of motherhood.

On the side of men, transit lifestyles have diminished dominance over family headship as well as the paternal power that comes with such dominance. Conventionally, the basis of men's paternal power lay in access and control over familial assets, mainly land

and cattle, whose value has marginally decreased due to massive proletarianisation and salarisation (Therborn, 2004). The existence of mass transit routes and transportation means as well as formal and informal employment markets has enabled women take on employment activities such as hair dressing, street vending and tailoring, as well as piece rate contract work in homesteads and private companies, both within and outside their countries of origin. According to Lange (2003), women's informal employment stands for not less than 90 percent of all the new jobs created in urban Africa and brings 50-70 percent of the household incomes. Therefore the burden of household economic provisioning is no longer solely shouldered by urban men. Although some men may perceive women's search for economic independence as a threat to their supremacy, others view female entrepreneurship as a necessity for counteracting the prevailing uncertainties in meeting the household expenditure. Even men's control over women's mobility has become an undesired gender norm because moral support of immediate family, independent mobility and being allowed to meet with men, are critical to women's economic advancement (Roomi, 2013).

Electronic forms of access to education have also supported transit lifestyles for women and given them empowering personal experiences, hence gaining the intellectual capability to question male power and doubly strive for financial independence (Gender News, 2013). Additionally, political reforms that are in favor of quota systems within legislatures and other arms of government, have seen women make impressive inroads into national-level decision-making bodies, thus pushing for familial and marital legislations that seek to reduce men's control over women's mobility, even in migratory contexts (Von Struensee, 2005; Goetz, 2002). Similarly, women's biographies and access to corporate information has enabled them penetrate different types of industry across borders, at all managerial and leadership levels, albeit the challenges faced in rising through the corporate ladder (Winn, 2004; Schipani et al. 2006). Therefore the gendered nature of transnational processes has gradually contracted male supremacy, and these either stem from within or outside the family.

However, this is not to conclude that traditional gender norms and ideologies have been completely altered by transit family lifestyles. Research undertaken by England (2010) showed that progress towards equal power relations between women and men has stalled since the 1990's and the outcomes have also been uneven. For instance, as more women strive to penetrate the paid labour market to support the household budget, men have not made a huge presence in unpaid domestic care work. Therefore women continue to face gender-role conflicts and strains that usually result from the desire to balance their familial with work place demands (Heiligers & Hingstman, 2000; Higgins et al. 2000; Chambers, 2006). The challenge is even more complex in Africa where high-tech employment and flexible working schedules for work-family effectiveness are still scarce. Telecommuting for instance, which Kossek et al. (2006) found to be very useful for corporate mothers in advanced and emerging economies, has not yet been embraced by most work places in the developing south. This implies that the transnational wave high-tech form of labour activity has had imbalanced outcomes for women in general.

But since female labour migration is almost equal to that of males (Donato et al. 2006; Pessar and Mahler, 2006; Pribilsky, 2004), transnational familial structures and practices have emerged, thereby contesting the traditional gender ideologies around motherhood and fatherhood. Due to transnationalism, family arrangements now embody the double-income rule, where fathers and mothers 'equally' contribute to the household expenditure, although men are still passive actors in child rearing and domestic chores. This can be partly attributed to maternal gatekeeping, where mothers are hesitant to change traditional divisions of family responsibility for fear of societal criticism over their mothering agency (Allen and Hawkins, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2005). Conversely, women's transit lifestyles have in some segments of the African society reconfigured men's adherence to traditional gender ideologies and norms over familial responsibilities. Using time use surveys and national statistics, Hook (2006), found out that men's allocation of more time to unpaid domestic care

work was primarily premised on women's salient presence in paid employment. But this new construction of familial-work roles has had negative marital impacts, especially amongst dual-career couples. Traditional marital set-ups are facing contestation from the alternatives including cohabitation, lone-parent-hood and single-person (Esping-Andersen, 2009). The incidence of these atypical alternatives is likely to intensify in cities of Africa since couples are increasingly operating in a migratory context. On the whole, transnational family arrangements in Africa are not largely the result of stringent migration policies, but a preferred choice of family members, since the norms guiding family structures allow different members from the extended family to fulfill varied functions, such as income earning, childcare and elderly care.

### **The study in Kampala city: materials and methods**

Kampala is Uganda's capital and only city, occupied by 40% of the national urban population (UBOS, 2002). Its administrative body is known as Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), which is further subdivided into five administrative divisions including Kawempe, Makindye, Nakawa, Rubaga and Central division. Together with KCCA, these divisions through their political and technical teams ought to plan and deliver a number of services including compliance to labour legislation, monitoring migration trends as well as social protection for families in the city. At the time of this study, however, KCCA lacked city-specific data on employment, migration and labour patterns. This limitation was overcome by sourcing descriptive statistics from national entities including the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD).

According to the national labour market situation report (2006), urban areas comprise of 15.4% of the total number of economically active labour force in the country, 70.8% of which is concentrated in Kampala city. The capital also receives the highest level of migrant labour, rated at 30% of the total according

to UBOS (2012). Most of these reside and work between Kampala and other countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and America. The reasons for their concentration in Kampala are that the city received an optic fiber cable in late 2010, thus easing and fastening internet connection. Kampala also has good telecommunication services with not less than 5 mobile phone, banking and internet operators, in addition to emerging high class hotels and the availability of cheap public and private transport means (UBOS, 2010).

Although the above socio-economic characteristics made Kampala a suitable study area, no accurate quantitative data could be found on the specifics of transnational labour, except for the fact that most of them are aged between 30-60 years, with parental responsibilities in and outside the city. This is why the study used a purposive sample of 150 mobile professionals who were interviewed using a checklist of questions, and many of these had to be contacted from home, at the work place or from urban traffic. Out of the 150 respondents, 139 completed the interview session, which gave a response rate of 92.6%. The sample included men and women migrating with their spouses, leaving spouses behind, with spouses migrating elsewhere as well as single, divorced or widowed mothers and fathers (Table 1).

Analysis of interview data was conducted as conversations were being carried out. This permitted immediate grouping of responses to ultimately make sense of the experiences shared using themes that were derived from the study objectives. This was complemented by extensive review of literature with content on transnationalism, families, cities, globalisation and transnational parenthood. Qualitative analyses were made from each piece of literature by reading, reflecting on and interpreting texts to stimulate thought and gain relevant insights.

### **The socio-economic consequences of transit family lifestyles in the city**

This section focuses on whether parenting from a distance has observable psychosocial effects on an individual, as either a father or mother. The experiences

**Table 1.** Purposive sample of transnational labour in Kampala city, Uganda

Category	Men	Women	Totals
Co-resident with spouse	10	12	22
Spouse left behind	13	30	43
Spouse migrating separately	11	10	21
Separated from spouse/single	14	16	30
Widowed	6	17	23
<b>Totals</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>139</b>

shared with transnational parents in Kampala city, revealed that labour migration across the developing city regions, makes working parents go months and sometimes years without seeing their children. In some cases, children and parents know each other through voices from the telephones, photographs, seasonal greeting cards and more recently –amongst relatively upper income families –computer-aided visuals such as those enabled by i-pads, Skype cameras and electronic mail. Although no statistical accuracy could be reached on the timelines of mother-child separation and father-child separation, a number of interviewees said that they can spend 4 to 6 months or sometimes a year without having physical contact with their children. This is relatively a low timeline when compared to the findings from other transnational studies, especially in America and Asia.

In her study of Mixtecs from Oaxaca working in Central New Jersey, Joanna (2006) reported an average length of mother-child separation of 3.4 years and an average length of father-child separation of 9.2 years for respondents in her sample. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2005) calculated the time spent by parents with their children by dividing the length of stay

abroad by the length of visits, reporting that in her sample in the Philippines, migrant mothers spent an average of 23.9 weeks with their children over the course of an average of 11.42 years, while migrant fathers spent 74 weeks with their children over 13.79 years. Further probing amongst the interviewees in Kampala, indicated that parents in African settings may not take as much time, when compared to other continents, because of the moral obligations constructed by society and religion that parents who stay away from their children are likely to risk poor upbringing, especially on the side of mothers. But some argued that parenting from afar is a sacrifice one has to make to fulfill the economic/material obligations that come with child-rearing in resource limited settings.

The observable cross-cutting concern amongst all the respondents was that the severity of the consequences depends on the longevity of separation from one's child, differences in personal capabilities to handle the emotions arising and the size of one's support network, including the extended family, friends and work place colleagues. To illustrate the point, a migrant resident in Kasanga, Makindye division of

Kampala city disclosed during the study that she was indeed sad because her new born baby was sick, yet her husband had left two days ago for a business trip to Eritrea, and she was now receiving comfort from her mother, who cannot help much since she is cash poor and the baby needed to go to hospital immediately. The woman confided in the research team that when such situations arise, she always thinks of going back to Ethiopia where she has close contacts with her relatives and friends for help. The interviewee continued that the sick baby is likely to make her lose weight and inability to sleep for fear of a worse situation, when the father is absent. This indicates that migrants in Kampala city endure an adjustment process that is psychosocial, due to departure and separation from one's country of origin and distance from loved ones as well as the economic uncertainties in the recipient country.

The mobile professionals of Ugandan origin, who temporarily or permanently migrate, said that they are forced to take on a transnational life style in an attempt to reduce income poverty for purposes of providing means of sustenance for the immediate and extended family. They are faced with a contradictory choice of deciding to remain income-poor or to create distance from their families and demonstrate how much they can sacrifice to take care of them. The children and relatives who remain at home also find themselves in a challenging situation, as the children ought to embrace the process of learning to live with a parent(s) who is physically unavailable, and cope with the emotions of seeing other children at schools and in play fields with their parents, hand-in-hand, especially over the weekends. Because of the profound psychosocial changes associated with semi-permanent loss of parents, Achotegui (2010) argues that children and their transnational parents are at heightened risk for depression, anxiety, addictions and other problems that could affect their day-to-day functioning. This implies that the process of adjusting to parent-child separation cannot end without going through the stages of physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion.

In Kampala, the study found out that managing the migratory process is dependent on the perceptions

and meanings attached to the separation, mainly; sacrifice or abandonment. This is at both individual and family level, and highly determines how the emotional consequences of transnational parenthood are managed. Many respondents confessed that child-parent separation is traumatic at the beginning and the ability to manage depends on one's character, maturity, life experience, past responses to traumas and the quality of fatherhood or motherhood received when still a child. These conditions do create variations in the ability to cope with the new distance from loved ones, and overcome the trauma of parent-child separation, while at the same time looking for a job and a place to live. According to an interviewee, finding valuable work and a habitable home in the western world is an uphill task, especially if your training was completely acquired in Uganda. The respondents, however, argued that the monetary remittances made while parenting from afar, may result into fewer instances of prolonged emotional distress. On the contrary, Smith et al. (2004) argue that while some migrant parents may become competent providers of both material and emotional resources via teleparenting strategies, being a good parent from afar still cannot fully compensate for the physical absence of the parent.

Conversely, a collation of the responses gathered indicated that parent-child separation is mainly a result of economic desperation, and therefore ought to be seen as a signifier of personal resolve and determination. This is especially the case when the responses below are considered:

"When my husband died in 2001, I decided to start a dealership in beers and sodas to ensure that I can continue paying school fees for my children and the house rental fees. Business started expanding as I acquired more capital, so I started travelling to Rwanda, Kenya and Southern Sudan, as a way of growing my business. Therefore I had to seek help from my sister, to come and join our family to take of the children as I go away on business, because she is one of the few people I can trust," *narrated a respondent in Mutungo, Kampala city.*

"After school, I started looking for jobs in my country, Kenya, but the opportunities were not readily available. So I decided to come to Uganda for further studies and made friends with my fellow graduate

students. It is these friends that connected me to the job I have now, and my wife is not with me because she was able to find a job in Kenya and prefers staying with the children there. So, every fortnight, I take the bus to Nairobi to visit my family and children,” said a respondent in Mbuya Kampala city.

The implication here is that the decision to parent at a distance often happens as a household survival strategy. Migration can also diffuse within a family via new or already existing social networks, such those acquired through schooling in another country, and ultimately becomes acceptable within the household as the available economic strategy. Actually, many of the respondents agreed that the pressure to provide for one’s family and the lack of alternative ways to match an increase in the cost of living with a higher household income, have gradually nurtured children and their parents into a family context where migration is no longer seen as problematic, rather supported and embedded within their life cycle.

Therefore the negative psychosocial consequences discussed should not downplay the economic drivers and benefits of a transnational family life. As pointed out earlier, this is why the traditional male-headed and female-headed households have given rise to new kinds of familial set-ups. These set ups, particularly transnational fatherhood and motherhood, may not necessarily make significant alterations in the traditions and customs that lie beneath African family dynamics, but rather act as signals for how the form and functioning of family relations can change depending on the prevailing socio-economic circumstances.

### Implications for immigration policy and planning in Africa

Findings from the study indicated that family survival is something that transcends attachment to places, as defined by territorial boundaries, and the classical elements of social bonding in Africa, including ethnicity, tribe and kinship. Transit professionals and their families are now a great presence in Africa’s educational institutions, from kindergartens to universities. Many businesses, including restaurants, shopping malls, construction, banking and telecommunications

are partly dependent on either immigrant or transit labour. Immigrant neighbourhoods are also increasingly becoming salient in African cities to offer assistance to those in transit and newcomers in the search for jobs, affordable housing and proximity to family members. Therefore the context and content of immigration controls, policies and institutions in Africa may necessitate change and embrace the new forms of family dynamics that emanate from transit lifestyles.

For countries like Uganda, which recently developed her immigration policy in 2012, the challenge lies in balancing control with flexibility. On one hand, the controls are needed to allow migrants into the country in ways that do not infringe on the rights of citizens. On the other hand, flexibility is required to allow migrant workers and families obtain a sense of acceptance so that they can significantly contribute to economic development. The immigration environment should not only be conducive for individual persons seeking to acquire a permanent visa, work permits or citizenship identity cards, but also their families, either living within or outside the country. This requires for a multi-dimensional approach to immigration planning that emphasises both individual rights and access to enabling services including but not necessarily limited to communication, transport, housing, security and business development. Similarly, those living and working permanently or temporarily in the diaspora, need family protection services for their own psychosocial comfort. This is because immigration policies tend to be inclined towards the rights and services needed by migrant workers from other countries. This is a loophole that can downplay citizen potential to join the global network of wedged work, and ultimately contribute to the economic welfare of their families and the nation through remittances. Therefore access to formal social security services for transnational households needs to be studied adequately in policy and planning circles, if appropriate responses are to be put in place.

It also calls for child protection and probation services that are sensitive to the increasing instances of parent-child separation due to transnational reasons, and the psychosocial consequences that arise

therefrom on the side of children. A service satisfaction survey undertaken by Buyana and Lwasa (2011) in Kampala showed that much of the child protection at city planning level is anchored in the enforcement approach rather than incentives for family welfare. Enforcement is applied using city laws and regulations that seek to control the prevalence of street child as well as their rehabilitation to government-run probationary centers. But if the city is to adequately tackle the dynamics that underlie child welfare, incentives that for example target transnational family cycles should be provided, so as to enable children adapt to the resultant psychosocial consequence using their creativity and resourcefulness.

Categorisation and analysis of transnational networks is also required in planning cycles, by for example using dichotomies such as informal and formal, employer and employee, immigrant and emigrant, familial and statist transnationalism(s). These can offer planners a better understanding of the vulnerability, risks, and interdependence between and amongst transnational networks (Sandoval, 2013; Simone, 2011; Leach, 2013). The dichotomies can further question the assumptions that underlie planning mechanisms, for example in terms of how stable the relationship of urban populations to places is and the types of transnational movements that require policy engagement within cities and how they impact of family lifestyles and workers' well-being. But overall, migrants' agency, in terms of how an individual perceives his or her migratory forces and consequences, is critical in acting as a basis for any policy or planning initiative. This would attach importance to individual recollections of migratory experiences so that family relationships and the construction of personal identity are at the center of planning.

## Conclusion

Majority of African research on migration processes and policy has been through an economic perspective often giving less attention to how socio-cultural orientations impact migratory choices and experiences at family level. In this contribution, I have made an effort to examine how the socio-cultural aspects of the

African family have been reconfigured by the economic decisions underlying the adoption of transit lifestyles amongst mobile professionals in cities. The study findings revealed that transnational parenthood is characterised by economic and socio-cultural sacrifices and the two are inversely connected: the socio-cultural experiences impact on the economic decisions of transnational families and economic decisions affect the socio-cultural well-being of both parents and their children. Therefore parent-child separation as a result of the quest for better wedges is inherently logical, especially when individual agency is considered, and will continue to impact on the form and functioning of African family set ups.

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