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among middle class West African
fathers in South Africa**

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Abstract

Growing numbers of West African men have migrated to cities elsewhere in Africa, as well as to cities across the global North. Those who are fathers have recast their roles. This paper examines transnational fathering practices and norms among documented, married, middle class migrant Nigerian and Ghanaian men in Johannesburg (South Africa). These migrant fathers were very critical of the South African environment, which they uniformly regarded as bad for child-raising. In almost all cases, they chose to leave their families in West Africa. Most fathers are playing the role of economic provider, but this does not preclude their playing a range of other roles in their children's lives. New communication technologies allow them to remain in contact with their wives and children, taking part in everyday activities including prayers, routine discipline, and decision-making. The roles played by migrant fathers were secured by the kinship webs that supported their wives and children at home in West Africa. The findings challenge existing gendered understandings of who does emotion work in transnational families, as these West African transnational fathers work to maintain an 'absent presence' as good fathers, making themselves emotionally and semi-physically (albeit virtually) available to their families.

1. Introduction

Aban¹ is a 28-year-old graduate from Ghana who now works as a barber in Johannesburg, South Africa. He has been in Johannesburg for 5 years. He came to South Africa on a visitor's visa. After it expired he used an asylum permit for two years. At the time of the interview (in 2014) he was on a work permit that was set to expire at the end of the year. His two young children remain in Accra, where they attend a boarding school. After their mother's recent move to Johannesburg, the two children are cared for by Aban's mother during school holidays. Aban's three brothers are living in the UK and his two sisters are

¹ All participants' names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

living in Accra. Although physically absent from his wife and children for four years, Aban speaks every morning and evening with his wife and frequently with his children also, by calling teachers at the boarding school who pass the phone to the children. He maintains a good relationship with the teachers, taking them presents when he visits Accra. Aban regularly sends photos to his children via WhatsApp and Facebook. Aban, who does not plan to settle permanently in South Africa, has no intention of bringing his children to or raising them there. New communications technologies allow him to remain in contact. He does not believe his relationship with his children has been affected. He does not believe that children need to live with their parents.

The family of Aban and his wife are typical of many middle-class documented Ghanaian and Nigerian families who, on account of limited opportunities in Ghana or Nigeria, have ‘transnationalised’. They have migrated in pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere, whilst their children remain in West Africa. Such migrant parents maintain close ties with their families despite physical distance. Johannesburg is home to many men like Aban – like many cities in the global North. Such migrants vary by nationality and ethnicity but tend to share many other characteristics (Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Coe, 2006; 2011b; McGregor, 2008): they are members of transnational families, accustomed to not living with their children; well-educated with stable marriages and strong networks of kin support; involved fathers, who not only provide for their families but also engage in regular physical and virtual contact; and have no desire to bring their children to South Africa as they see it as a bad environment for raising children.

Transnational studies have focused on migrant parents and families who move from the global South to the global North, including especially migration from Latin America (Abrego, 2009; Dreby, 2010; Nobles, 2011) and South and East Asia (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; Parreñas, 2008, 2011). Much less attention has been paid to the family lives of migrants from Africa, or to the family lives of migrants whose destinations are also in the global South, such as other parts of Africa (Mazzucato, 2011). African men and women account for the lion’s share of South-South migration (Ratha & Shaw, 2007, cited in Stulgaitis, 2015). This neglect results in a lop-sided or incomplete understanding of transnational migration, because the patterns and experiences of transnational migration are different across much of Africa (notwithstanding considerable variation within Africa, including along ethnic, religious and class lines). In Africa, families are often not co-resident, and draw on extended kinship ties for child-raising, independently of, and prior to, transnational migration. Furthermore, technological advances in communication may not be experienced the same way within Africa as between other regions and the global North. The importance of analysing African transnational family life is evident in the few extant studies of transnational migrants from parts of both West and Southern Africa (Bledsoe &

Sow, 2011; Coe, 2006; McGregor, 2008). Cultural preferences and parenting practices among West African migrants in Europe contrast with those of Mexican and Philippino families. For example, West African immigrants in Europe and North America often send their children back to West Africa because they experience problems of discipline in both school and home in the host country, and in order to connect to their culture and extended family (Mazzucatto & Schans, 2011: 707, citing Bledsoe & Sow, 2011).

In this paper, we investigate practices of fathering amongst a sample of documented, middle class, married fathers from West Africa – specifically, Ghana and Nigeria – who have migrated to Johannesburg. We aim to deepen our understanding of the level of complexity involved in maintaining a presence in extended family networks that stretch across national boundaries. In South Africa, as in many other places, families are transnational due to a combination of norms, preferences and ‘choices’ that people make, and the constraints of economics, opportunities of kin support, and (increasingly) immigration legislation. We show that, once their families have been ‘transnationalised’ migrant fathers negotiate their ‘fathering’ roles in relation to their families and kin at ‘home’, the South African state and society, and new communication technologies.

West African families have long been distinguished by very high rates of intra-national and transnational migration, as well as the separation over long distances of male breadwinning husbands from wives, and of parents from children (Coe, 2011b; Cordell *et al.*, 1996; Fortes, 1950). Much of the classic sociological literature on family life in the global North assumes that proximity, co-presence and households structured around parent-child relationships represent the norm for family life. This assumption is challenged by studies of transnational families from the South (e.g. Reynolds & Zontini, 2014), but it is not clear what happens when this was never the norm or when the context changes with a shift from internal to international migration? A normative family for a transnational family may entail having family members living in different countries as opposed to different parts of a country, who may not physically see each other for long periods of time or have any expectations of co-presence. The literature on African households in many different parts of the continent has long challenged the assumption of proximity and co-presence. Concepts such as ‘domestic fluidity’ try to capture the very different practices and norms of family relations in Southern Africa (Spiegel *et al.*, 1996; Seekings, 2008). Families where parents and children do not co-reside are not new in the African continent, considering that migration has become very common over the last century both within borders (Hansen, 1996; Lee, 2009; Murray, 1981; Ramphela, 1993; Townsend, 1997) and across borders (Crush, Jeeves & Yudelman, 1991; Pott, 2011). Much of the literature on parenting in Southern

Africa analyses how mothering (Walker, 1995; Lee, 2009; Moore, 2013) and fathering (Murray, 1981; Townsend *et al.*, 2006; Ramphele, 1993) is maintained across time and space.

Migration has also been widespread across much of West Africa (see, for example, Cordell, Gregory & Piché, 1996). Coe (2011b) argues that placed within the context of historical family practices in Ghana, international migration is both an extension of internal migration and a new phenomenon. More specifically, Coe emphasizes the ‘distance inherent in international migration makes social relationships more difficult to keep up’ (2011b: 159). However, it has also been argued that the effects of distance have been modified by technological advances in communication over the last few years. Intimacy might be maintained across long distances if parents have instant or frequent contact with their families at ‘home’ (Madianou, 2011; Madianou & Miller, 2012). Much of the existing literature on how new technologies, such as Skype, instant messaging, social networking sites and other internet and mobile phone-based platforms, achieve intimacy across borders is based in regions where internet access is cheaper and readily available.

Drawing attention to this, Parreñas (2014) argues that the idea that communication technologies allows for parents to be present absent (or always available) fails to consider the macro and micro structural constraints that impede communication amongst low-income migrant parents. She argues that the underdevelopment of parts of the Philippines, coupled with non-accommodating labour conditions and the absence of resources for low-wage workers, impose real constraints on communication. Parreñas vehemently challenges the arguments made by Madianou & Miller (2012) that new technological communication provides the solution for supporting transnational family life. While this may be rapidly improving, migrants and transnational families within the African continent have less access to such media due to poorer infrastructure and higher costs (Nyamnjoh, 2014). The greater ease with which travel and communication is available is still countered by economic hardship that some transnational migrants experience. It is in this regard that a sample of middle class migrant fathers in a major capital, with families residing mainly in cities, pushes us to see what is possible when financial and possibly labour constraints play a lesser role. Is communication between transnational fathers and their families who live in cities in South and West Africa accessible, seamless, multi-directional and does it result in integrated lives?

Many African societies remain, in Mkhize’s analysis, ‘collective societies’ in which members of the extended family are ‘expected to take an active responsibility for the wellbeing of their relatives’ children (Mkhize, 2006: 187). Coe (2011b: 150), for example, documents how the care of children by relatives

and nonrelatives is widely practiced and is not frowned upon in many parts of West Africa. An important feature of understanding transnational parenting practices within the African context is a key difference where fathering is a collective social responsibility of the family. In fact, Madhavan & Roy (2012) go as far as to argue that this is precisely what allows fathers in low income areas in South Africa and the USA to secure their fathering role as kin workers enable them to meet culturally-defined criteria for responsible fatherhood. Such an understanding of how care is provided to children will automatically shift perceptions of what it means to be a 'good father'. We might assume that a collective approach to understanding fathering allows for the acknowledgement of the role played by significant others, including uncles, aunts, and grandparents in raising the children, and gives African migrant fathers more support in meeting culturally sanctioned norms of fathering. This means that, on the one hand, migrant fathers from and in Africa may feel less responsible for their biological children than migrant parents from other regions of the world. On the other hand, they may feel more responsible for non-biological children, given that a man can be a 'father' to many. Diffuse responsibilities of care and provision do not result in the negation of parenting responsibilities. This paper unpacks the kind of parenting that West African fathers perform in order to better enhance or expand understandings/current research of/on transnational parenting practices in the global South.

Discussions on transnational fathering remain scarce in the literature on migration and transnational families (Parreñas, 2008). Mazzucato & Schans argue that 'To get a complete picture of transnational family life, it is important to add fathers to the picture, not just on the sideline but as main actors' (2011: 707). Most transnational family scholarship has focused on mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2014; Madianou, 2011) or parenting (Dreby, 2016). A general focus of the literature has been a tendency to compare the experiences of migrant mothering and fathering, especially in so far as they undo the conventional division of labour. Both Parreñas (2006) Kilkey *et al.* (2014) and Dreby (2006) argue that parents' experience of separation confirm gender ideals around parenthood, in that fathers are good migrant fathers if they provide financially for their children, and mothers are good migrant mothers if they both look after their children financially as well as maintain emotional intimacy despite the distance. Noting the gap in comparing the experiences of migrant mothers and fathers, Dreby (2006) finds that the parenting activities of migrant mothers and fathers are similar, but the experiences differ. Dreby argues that migrant mothers and fathers live in different types of transnational families. Mothers' relationships with their children are highly dependent on demonstrating emotional intimacy from a distance, whereas fathers' relationships lie in their economic success as migrant workers. Parreñas supports this argument by arguing that 'transnational fathers tend to perform a heightened

version of conventional fathering' (2008: 1058). Distant mothering adjusts to meet the engendered needs of the family by maternal absence, but transnational fathers do not reconstruct fathering to adjust to the needs created by the temporal and spatial distance that defines transnational family life (*ibid*).²

A criticism of the literature on fathering generally and transnational fathering in particular is that it takes a very limited view of the role of father (Doucet, 2006; Dermott, 2008; Ratele *et al.*, 2012) and often decontextualises fatherhood. Some transnational studies on fathering remain focused on their roles as breadwinners who remit to their families at home (Dreby, 2010; Pribilsky, 2004), with little attention to how fathers negotiate the challenge of balancing the costs of physical (and other) contact, which cultivates closeness, with the costs of ongoing daily provision. In contrast, Nobles (2011) shows how Mexican migrant fathers are involved through telephone contact, supervising homework via Skype or over the phone, and sending clothes, in addition to breadwinning. Many scholars have highlighted the failure of scholars to consider the ways in which men are doing fathering that may not be considered 'conventional'. Ratele *et al.*'s (2012) research into South African fathers revealed two key themes that are rarely acknowledged in the comparative literature on fatherhood in the country: 'Being always there' and 'talking fathers' (Ratele *et al.*, 2012: 553). Their work presents useful insights for thinking about the ways in which African men enact fathering and caring practices as their findings demonstrate the ways in which some men are 'talking, nurturing, peaceful, and 'mother-like' fathers' (*ibid*: 559).

Maintaining closeness may be a gendered labour process (Parreñas, 2014: 426), but this does not exclude transnational fathers from creating bonds of intimacy with their children over long distances. Little attention has been paid to the alternative ways of maintaining contact that these transnational fathers undertake (although see Reynolds, 2006): for example, some use photographs and videos to display family ties and to maintain social connections among geographically dispersed family members. In contexts where male migration is more common and where male migrants have better access to technological equipment (given the absence of infrastructural development in migrant sending countries), fathers may play important roles in sustaining family relations through a variety of media.

In families where intimate life has been forged across distance for many years, where migration is normalised through the diasporic movement of parents, partners, siblings or cousins, men might be socialised and better equipped to

² Kilkey *et al.* (2013) findings on Polish male migrants in London tend to support these findings that although migrant fathers' responsibilities extend beyond breadwinning, there was no evidence of any parallels with migrant women in parenting.

maintain intimacy at a distance. Moreover, conventional understandings of fathers as primarily ‘breadwinners’ assume a particular understanding of intimacy which is associated with emotions rather than economics. Coe (2011a) argues that in Ghanaian family life, affection is understood to be expressed through the distribution of material resources. Such an understanding of love means that migrant fathers who remit money can be regarded as better parents than the caregivers who stay with their children. In this paper, we pay careful attention to the fathering practices by examining how transnational fathers link understandings of breadwinning with closeness.

2. Ghanaian and Nigerian Migrants in Johannesburg

There is an extraordinary lack of good data on migrants in South Africa. In 2012 the population of Nigerians in South Africa was estimated to be between 12,000 and 17,000, which is far below the population estimates reported in the media (Segatti, Adeagbo & Ogunyemi, 2012). The number of Ghanaians is smaller. About 10,000 temporary residence permits are issued each year to Nigerians, and about 2,000 to Ghanaians; few permanent resident permits are issued (Stulgaitis, 2015).

Whilst the precise numbers are not known, it is clear these are much smaller than the numbers of migrants from Southern Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique. In contrast to migration from Southern Africa, migration from West Africa only began after the end of apartheid. West African migrants also have a distinct gender and class profile. Segatti, Adeagbo & Ogunyemi describe the Nigerian immigrant population as ‘a primarily male population of small entrepreneurs, highly to medium-skilled workers, students, and dependents’ concentrated in the major metropolitan areas (2012: 3). The same seems to be true of Ghanaian migrants. According to these researchers, there is little data

to help us understand whether Nigerians’ migratory trajectories to South Africa differ from those of other migrants from the region or beyond, or whether their settlement in South Africa is a primary or secondary choice. Too little is also known of the reasons that motivate highly skilled Nigerians to settle in South Africa (*ibid*: 6).

But Nigerians themselves cite the lack of economic and educational opportunities and political persecution at home as reasons behind their coming to South Africa (*ibid*). Migration, then, appears to be circular (as it is generally in Southern Africa; see Pott, 2011).

Although Nigerian migrants are active participants in many parts of the South African economy, they are widely stereotyped as criminals (although there is no quantitative evidence that Nigerians or any other foreign migrants are disproportionately involved in crime – see Segatti *et al.*, 2012: 5) and they often experience hostility from South Africans. This hostility is a strong version of the general xenophobia that pervades much of South African society. The severity of xenophobia against foreigners generally was revealed in May 2008 when 62 people were brutally killed and thousands displaced in xenophobic attacks, mostly across Gauteng (Sharp, 2008; Landau, 2010; Robins, 2009). Both before and after May 2008 isolated attacks were frequent. Most of these attacks were concentrated in poorer townships and informal settlements, and seem to have been fueled by accusations that foreign migrants are perpetrating criminal acts, stealing jobs from South Africans, out-competing South African shopkeepers, spreading diseases like HIV/AIDS and ‘taking’ local women (Tafira, 2011; Landau, 2010; Sharp, 2008; Neocosmos, 2008).

The state feeds as much as it limits xenophobic hostility to immigrants. According to Neocosmos:

Government departments, parliamentarians, the police, the Lindela detention centre, and the law itself have all been reinforcing a one-way message since the 1990s: we are being invaded by illegal immigrants who are a threat to national stability, the Reconstruction and Development Programme, development, our social services, and the very fabric of our society (Neocosmos, 2008: 588).

As early as 1998, the Minister of Home Affairs declared that “if we as South Africans are going to compete for scarce resources with millions of aliens who are pouring into South Africa, then we can bid goodbye to our Reconstruction and Development Programme” (Neocosmos, 2010: 99; see also Human Rights Watch, 1998; Sharp, 2008). When attacks escalated in 2008, the state’s response was “confused, contradictory, and often overtly ideological”, wrote Neocosmos. ‘During the violence, the government first denied the crisis and then blamed criminal elements, opposition parties, and ‘sinister forces’, occasionally evoking a mysterious ‘third force’ (Neocosmos, 2008: 588).

Framing migrants as criminals also serves to legitimate arrest, detention and deportation, and the violation of their human rights (Robins, 2009; Mahati 2012a, 2012b). Foreign migrants experience difficulties in accessing public services such as health, education and housing, even when they have formal rights to these (Moyo, 2010; Nkosi, 2004; Stulgaitis, 2015). Non-state actors have also on occasion legitimated coercion against foreigners. A report from the

Human Sciences Research Council in 2008 recommended a tightening of border controls to stop foreigners ‘coming and going as they please’ (see Sharp, 2008).

In addition to intermittent xenophobic violence, migrants are also vulnerable to the everyday violence and crime that afflicts everyone in South Africa. South Africa has very high rates of violent crime, including murder, assault and rape. Landau has argued that xenophobic and everyday violence are linked. For migrants from other parts of Africa, xenophobic and everyday violence and crime fuse together to create an environment into which men are hesitant to bring their families, as we shall see below.

Our sample of interviewees

Our study takes as its focus the experiences of four Ghanaian and nine Nigerian men, interviewed in Johannesburg between late 2013 and early 2015. Interviewees were selected through snowballing, and thus were dependent on the researcher’s and migrants’ social networks. Only men with one or more children in their home countries were selected. Prospective interviewees were provided with an information sheet on the objectives of the research project, what the interviews would entail, and their rights as participants. Interviews were conducted following verbal consent. The interviewees were subsequently given a small gift of mobile phone airtime as a token of our gratitude. The research was approved through the research ethics procedures of the University of Cape Town.

Our thirteen interviewees ranged in age from 28 to 48 years old (see Table 1). They were all married, with a total of 35 children ranging in ages from 0 to 22 years old. The wives of the male participants were all living in West Africa. Our interviewees were highly-educated: more than half of our interviewees had university degrees. A minority had completed high school but not studied further. About half were university lecturers, researchers or PhD students. The other half were mostly self-employed: traders, a pastor, a barber, a pedicurist. A few were short-term migrants, in that they had been away for only one or two years. Some had been away for much longer. Three had been away for more than ten years. All were documented.

Table 1:

Name	Nationality	Age	Number of children	Ages of children	Years lived abroad	Current Work	Highest level of education
Aban	Ghana	28	2	5 & 9	4	Barber	Undergraduate degree
Coffie	Ghana	31	2	1 & 3	6	Pedicurist	High school
Fram	Ghana	48	3	12 – 18	1	Postgraduate student	Undergraduate degree
Kwasi	Ghana	40	2	4 & 9	11	Postdoctoral Research Fellow	PhD
Emmanuel	Nigeria	39	3	6 – 11	2	Lecturer	PhD
Victor	Nigeria	36	2	3 & 5	2	Postdoctoral Research Fellow	PhD
Sam	Nigeria	47	2	0 & 8	9	Postgraduate student	Masters degree
Isaac	Nigeria	38	3	17 – 22	18	PhD Student	Masters degree
Ayodele	Nigeria	43	4	7 & 12	12	PhD Student	Masters degree
Kelvin	Nigeria	38	1	3	5	PhD Student	Masters degree
Goodwin	Nigeria	46	5	9 & 15	1	Formal Trader	High school
Opeyemi	Nigeria	29	2	4 & 9	3	Informal trader	High school
Adewale	Nigeria	36	2	7 & 14	6	Pastor	High school

Our interviewees came from cities in Nigeria (such as Port Harcourt, Lagos and Warri) and Ghana (primarily from Accra). One migrant, a Ghanaian, had come to South Africa from Europe, where he had been studying (for more than ten years); the others came directly from West Africa. Our interviewees were ethnically diverse, although most were raised in patrilineal and Christian societies. Some come from highly mobile families. Adewale, for example, has several siblings living outside Nigeria (and married to non-Nigerians).

Several had come to South Africa to study (although Aban was conned out of his money and forced to find work rather than study). Others had come to work. Two worked at a university but most were in other service sectors. Coffie, who learnt to polish nails in Ghana, now runs a small registered beauty parlour company, employing five people. Adewale is a PhD student. Goodwin and Opeyemi are both traders. Adewale, a Nigerian, came to South Africa to play professional football, like a number of West African football players (see Darby & Solberg, 2010; Cornelissen & Solberg, 2007). Coffie also came because of football: “I wanted to become part of the World Cup in 2010”, he says, although he explains that he did not come to play but rather to take advantage of the economic opportunities that he thought would open up. Some interviewees migrated in part because they wanted ‘to see the world’. Ayodele, for example, says that he had ‘a wanderlust’.

Only one of these migrants sees himself as entirely settled in South Africa. Goodwin, a trader, planned to stay in Johannesburg but only on condition that South Africa allows his children to visit or join him. The others either expect to return to West Africa or they anticipate or aspire to move on to somewhere else, preferably in Europe or North America. Fram, a student, intends to return to Ghana after he completes his one year postgraduate degree. The pastor (Adewale) says that he now has strong roots in South Africa, but he also insists ‘I’m going back to Nigeria, that one is for sure. I will go back’. Victor moved to Johannesburg on April 2012 using a visitor’s visa. He plans to work briefly in South Africa and raise money to travel to Canada. He was told by one of his friends that there are many jobs and scholarship funds in Canada. Some of our interviewees were uncertain of the future, and said it was up to God. Kelvin’s future would depend on where ‘the spirit leads me’, he told us.

Most interviewees had left their children behind in Ghana or Nigeria through choice. For example, Aban and Fram left their children in Ghana in part because they were already in boarding schools, and their wives were (at the time) working in Ghana. For some migrants, the decision to leave their children in their countries of origin was a strategic action aimed at promoting their careers. For instance, Opeyemi, a lecturer at a university in Nigeria said

I didn't come with them because I was advised that if I come with them the PhD work would be very slow and that I should leave them behind. I will be able to concentrate, I can finish earlier compared to when I have them.

In a few cases, economic and legal constraints prevented the children coming to Johannesburg. Isaac, who aspires to remain permanently in South Africa, has permanent residency status, owns properties and registered businesses. But the South African Department of Home Affairs made it difficult for his wife or children to get visas even to visit him in South Africa. Almost all of the children are being looked after by their mothers, typically with the support of other kin. Aban has three children, who go to boarding school except in holidays when they live with their mother, Aban's wife. One of Emmanuel's children is also at boarding school. In the case of Aban, who is part of a patrilineal system of lineage, his wife (and sometimes children) lives with his mother. In contrast Coffie's wife (also from a patrilineal system of lineage) lives with her parents as Coffie did not want his wife living with his mother, because 'if they live together, expectations become very high' – and it means that he has to send additional money. Coffie explains, 'I often send my mother to go and check if things are OK with my wife and in-laws'. He explains that his wife 'is very young', and her mother 'updates my mother with what's happening and the mistakes my wife has made, so that my mother can also give her advice'. (He says that his wife takes the advice well). In addition, some migrant fathers, like Sam, put in place a system whereby their fathers provided care and support to the migrant's children and wives. These details map out the wide webs of kin (paternal and maternal) as well as non-kin (including teachers) who are involved, in varying degrees, in the care of the child. In the absence of the father, child-raising continues to be framed by a strong patriarchal system, and migrants' wives continue to experience patriarchal authority even in the absence of their husbands.

As other transnational family scholars have noted, interviews with migrants about parenting is not easy because the topic of separation is sensitive (Dreby, 2006). Our sample is limited to documented, middle-class men. We did not interview either their wives or their children. It should be unsurprising, then, that the sample involves no undocumented migrants. Recruiting and involving undocumented migrants in research is challenging as parents are trying to avoid exposure. It is also not surprising that the sample is based on middle class experiences as international migration in the past was for the purpose of higher education and reserved for the elites. Nowadays, argues Coe (2011b, citing Manuh, 2006), migration from places such as Ghana has been 'democratised', with a broader range of the population including skilled blue collar workers and

mechanics emigrating. As most participants in the sample were middle class, married and documented migrants, we are not able to discuss possible comparisons between their experience and the experiences of unmarried, working class or undocumented migrant fathers in South Africa. The sample of well-educated middle class married documented fathers clearly has the resources and capital to contact and visit family more often. As a group of married men, they potentially have access to a wider and stronger web of kin relations, which allows them to rely on a wider range of support whilst in South Africa. Moreover, as documented and employed migrants, they enjoy some security in South Africa and do not face all the challenges facing undocumented (or working class) migrant fathers. A further limitation of the sample concerns how experiences of fathering were obtained by drawing on the accounts only from the father and not from his partner or children. The inability to hear from children and the wives limits our understanding of the quality of father-child relationships and how it can be understood in terms of the father's account. Moreover, examining what is peculiar about transnational fathering is limited when the accounts cannot be compared with a sample of fathers who co-reside with their children in West Africa or a sample of fathers who are internal migrants and live elsewhere in Ghana and Nigeria.

3. Experiences of fathering

We firstly examine how migrants describe their 'traditional' fathering roles, as *economic* providers, breadwinners and role models, and then turn to how fathers describe their roles as 'distant' disciplinarians (to use a phrase coined by Parreñas, 2006). We then examine how fathering takes place in relation to a web of adults looking after children, which shapes what fathers can and need to do to cultivate relations with their children and to achieve their ideal of the good father. In doing this we present migrant fathers' perceptions of good fathering. We also examine the ways in which fathers report cultivating closeness through the use of a range of new communication technologies.

3.1. Fathers as economic providers and good breadwinners

For most of our interviewees, fathering continues to be tied to economic provision. Most of our interviewees feel that fathers should support their families and most of them do do this. Every month, Aban sends money – usually about R4,000 (approx. US\$275) – to his family, and he also pays school fees for his children. He says that he learnt as a child that fathers should provide food,

clothing and basic necessities for his family. ‘When they [want] anything, my wife will call me. If they need this, then I send money home. Every month, I send money home’ (Aban). Coffie similarly sends money every month, in his case about R2,000 (approx. US\$140), through Western Union. When he sends money he tells them how they must use it. Also, if someone is going to Ghana he asks them to take things like clothes, shoes and even money to his family. Emmanuel sends money, and also sends goods if he knows of someone who is going to Nigeria and can take things.

For some of the fathers in the sample, it is not sufficient simply to remit some money. These fathers are concerned about being good providers, meaning that they should send enough money to care adequately for their families. Many fathers had concerns about the financial situation of their families. Coffie claimed to have worried – with ‘many sleepless nights’ – on account of the financial problems facing his family. Failure to provide their offspring with financial support creates tension amongst the spouses. For example, Victor pointed out that he argues with his wife ‘when I fail to send money...customers fail to pay ... she feels embarrassed to see her children being chased away from school’.

Some of our interviewees were students who initially left their countries for one or two years. For Fram, he could continue to support his family because his employer in Ghana had a policy whereby they continue to support employees who study if the employees pass their courses. His employer – a trade union – gave him study leave and paid his salary, allowing him to continue to provide for his family. Ayodele, a PhD student, said that he pays the school fees and medical bills for his children. He repatriates about R50,000 (about US\$3400) per year to his family in Nigeria.

Many of our interviewees indicated that their wives were also working. In some cases, it seems that the wives are shouldering the larger burden of supporting their families. For example, Kelvin, also a PhD student, told us that his wife pays their child’s school fees as well as any medical expenses.

Only one of our interviewees – the Nigerian pastor (Adewale) – does not seem to have been a fulsome provider. He insists that it is his responsibility to pay his children’s school fees, but he himself seems to be the beneficiary of the largesse of his siblings who live and work in Europe and elsewhere. As a pastor, he seems to depend on the support of his congregants in Johannesburg – one of whom gave him a car – and in turn supports needy children there. He does not seem to remit much back to Nigeria. He feels less need to send money himself because, he tells us, his family has sufficient resources. Indeed, he says he is

‘very, very satisfied, more than satisfied’ with arrangements for the care of his children:

Even though I am not there or I don’t have money, you cannot even see because it’s not showing. The support of others covers everything, you understand what I’m saying? So it’s not, I don’t have one single problem with my children, my children are doing ok ... I don’t have any regrets.

His wife is working, and other family members assist financially. In these examples, we can see how a wider web of kin and non-kin support the family by providing economically and sharing the burden of breadwinning, which assists the migrant father.

However, not everyone enjoyed financial support from kin. Some (for example Opeyemi) said that their kin were too poor to be able to assist financially. In addition, Opeyemi informed us that he did not want to bother other people about his ‘problem’. Relatives, he says, ‘will be looking up to you to give them money because you are abroad’; if

you ask them to look after your children, you will be making a huge mistake. You go abroad to study. You have demonstrated that you have money. So you can’t afford to go and trouble those at home to take care of your children. They can offer assistance maybe in kind but never in cash.

Since he lives in South Africa people expect him to send them money. Migration is associated with economic success. His relatives still look up to him for financial assistance. In his case, his kin were not able support him and his family financially, but they did support them in other ways, including through prayer.

Some of our interviewees look after other kin besides their wives and children. Fram provides not only for his wife and three children, but also for his younger brother’s children, who are 14 and 12 years old. He explains:

we do send them money, we care for them ... we send them money for their upkeep and school, we are responsible for their education. Every month we spend about ..., let me see, let me say R300 (approx. US\$20) every month.

The financial responsibilities of migrant fathers stretch beyond the nuclear family. Many migrants within or from Africa have wider familial obligations. As much as a father might rely on a wider web of relations to care for his

children, he also reciprocates in the ways that he can, such as providing financial support to nieces and nephews.

3.2. Fathers as sources of moral authority and discipline

Migrant middle-class West African men in Johannesburg are not only economic providers. As Parreñas (2008) has found elsewhere, these men concur that migrant fathers should and do also play the roles of sources of moral authority and discipline. For example, one father told us that

if, after she [his wife] has cooked a meal, they [the children] don't want to eat their food, then she can ask me "please, dad, talk to them, for them to eat their food", and he would telephone the children and tell them to eat.

This is not, however, simple patriarchy: male authority is, in a transnational family context, constrained by the physical absence of the husband and physical presence of the wife; migrant fathers need to re-work and negotiate how they assert their authority, and this process comes with ensuing challenges.

Most of our interviewees portrayed themselves as holding modified patriarchal authority over their wives. Fathers expect to be consulted, but do not expect that they alone will make decisions. Victor, who last visited Nigeria in 2012, emphasised that his wife discussed any problem with him before she takes a decision. 'That's what we do in Nigeria ... Before a woman can do anything, she has to take permission from the husband'. She would consult him even if she wanted to take their children to their grandmother for the weekend. Opeyemi said that his wife can punish their children – for example 'she can tell them that they will not eat if they don't do their homework' and can beat them if necessary because he is away, but she should report to him. This would allow him to play a part. In this example the wife is assisting the father with maintaining his role as disciplinarian whilst she is enacting the role as well. In another example, Ayodele said that he is not the kind of man who takes all the decisions, and allows his wife to make decisions herself.

Given the father's moral role, paternal absence might compromise a child's moral development. Coffie worried that it is 'not easy' being separated from his family: 'I want my children to get a proper training, like the way I was brought up ..., things my mother taught us, to respect elders and not to backslide from the word of God'. Being absent means that he is not in full control, and he says

that he gets upset if things are not done according to his instructions or expectations. Similarly, Opeyemi said that, despite his wife's efforts to provide good care to their children, he was concerned about the effect of his absence, particularly in relation to discipline. His children needed their father 'to provide some coaching...to be disciplined, as my wife cannot offer disciplinary measures'. He claimed that when he was there 'she saw the result of my being a disciplinarian and bringing them up', but 'when I left them there was this gap that my wife could not breach, she can only play her role, but she cannot play my role'.

In practice, in most cases, other adults provided discipline and moral authority, which meant that paternal presence was less important and in a process of renegotiation. Coffie explained that his children were subject to the discipline of his wife, his mother, his wife's mother and his wife's sister. Adewale felt that he did not need to be present because his parents and wife provided sufficient discipline. Responsibility could often be shared because kin viewed discipline similarly. Emmanuel's wife reportedly shared his views, 'so there is no difference whether I am away'. Where there were differences, fathers expected to get their way, i.e. (they say) patriarchal norms prevailed. Fram invokes patriarchal conventions with regards to decision making. Sometimes his wife and him disagree about how the children should be raised, but ultimately he will decide what happens: 'She knows from my culture that the man's word is final, if we have different opinions she will agree with me, not that my opinion is better than her'. In other cases, the interviewees sent their children to boarding school, so that the school was, for most of the year, the immediate locus of authority over his children. Aban told us that his children only go home in December, for Christmas. Otherwise, 'they are in the hands of the teachers at school... they are the ones who are having them during the year'. Aban himself had been sent to boarding school by his parents. He is reproducing his parents' views on child-raising.

In 'collective' societies in Africa – perhaps in contrast to other societies studied by Parreñas (2006), for example – responsibility for the discipline of children is shared between a group of adults, although the range of such sharing might be shrinking (see Harper & Seekings, 2010 for a South African study). Again, this shows how traditional roles of the father such as disciplining are supported by kin. Parreñas, in talking to children, found that strict discipline aggravated the emotional rift between the father and child. She argues that fathers 'cling' to discipline as a way of retaining control and their identity in the family, and suggested that men 'assume' that they have to discipline their children in order to fulfill their parental duties. Our interviewees understood that they as fathers had responsibilities, and that (in most cases) their wives could not fill their shoes, but they also understood that these responsibilities could be shared with a

range of kin, including their wives, parents and school teachers. For our West African interviewees, providing discipline and moral authority seems to be in a process of change and less central to their identity than in the societies studied by Parreñas.

All the migrant fathers indicated that their parents used to beat them, when they themselves were children and misbehaved; their parents often physically disciplined them severely. Our interviewees themselves are, however, divided on whether corporal punishment is right or wrong. Sam says that he disciplines his children by beating them because he strongly believes in the saying ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ (from Proverbs 13:24: ‘He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him’). His view was echoed by Adewale and Kelvin. Kelvin commented that his parents had impressed upon him the importance of disciplining children when they do something wrong. ‘My parents never spared the rod ... Now that we are old we are not departing from it ... I am not sparing the rod’. Victor also had this experience of being beaten by his parents. He used to be beaten using a *koboko* (i.e. a whip made out of animal skin) when he misbehaved. Now he comments ‘I like Nigeria for that’, explaining that ‘children are very stubborn. When badly-behaved, children must be disciplined’.

Some of our interviewees emphasised the importance of instilling fear in their children. According to Opeyemi, for example:

For me any time they see me they fear me. They have my fear, all of them. So without shouting, just giving them simple instruction they obey because they fear. When I am not around they can be troublesome to the mother ... When I am not around my wife can complain on the phone that they don’t obey in some areas. When I am around they comply easily.

He tells us that his wife is ‘very soft’ and ‘handles them with a soft hand, so they sometimes take her for granted’. He himself had never handled

them with a soft hand so any time they see me around they behave well. ... For me they seem to comply more easily with whatever instructions given by me. With my wife they may still do it but they drag in complying.

When he is there, his children would never refuse to eat supper or do their schoolwork. ‘When I am around they do that easily’. Opeyemi does caution that ‘it’s good to be a disciplinarian but it’s not good to be too strict ..., to the point where it becomes a detriment’. He suggests that he is ‘a strict disciplinarian to

my children now' because that is how he was raised by his parents. 'But I am trying to balance it up'.

Migrant fathers sometimes disagree with their wives, often over how to discipline children. Victor went so far as to say that he thought that his wife beat their children too often: 'She always beats them ..., they are still too young'. His wife insists that children should be beaten if they misbehave. 'She says the best way to train them is to beat them ... I tell her to stop', because he doesn't like to hear his children crying over the phone. Ayodele, a PhD student, also clashed with his wife for severely beating their child. He said once their son had marks on his body after being beaten by his wife and he didn't like that: 'I believe in corporal punishment, but I think my wife does it too much'.

Besides clashing with their wives over how to raise children, some migrant fathers clashed with parents or siblings. For example, Ayodele, a PhD student, sometimes differed with his mother: "My mother wants me to speak in the local language with the children, she is not happy that they don't speak the local language properly". His mother, like his wife, was more in favour of corporal punishment than Ayodele himself. Fram also differed with his siblings, who insisted that he was too 'liberal' with his children, allowing them to talk to him too openly. The findings in this section show that although most fathers remain disciplinarians, the distance and separation has allowed for others to maintain a key role in disciplining children and migrant fathers need to negotiate the extent to which they can influence how children are disciplined.

3.3. Cultivating closeness through new media

Intimacy, as defined by Jamieson (2011: 8), is 'the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality'. How one maintains and builds up a close connection varies across contexts. As outlined earlier, Coe (2011a: 7) argues that 'in Ghanaian family life, affection is understood to be expressed through the distribution of material resources across generations'. Seeing connection purely as emotional or physical connection limits our understanding of the different ways in which intimacy and bonding can be expressed. Coe (2011a) argues that in Ghanaian families, communication and the materiality of care is important as a signal of emotional depth and closeness.

Migrant West African fathers in Johannesburg rarely see their children, and when they do it is often not for very long. There is some variation in how much physical contact the fathers have with their children. Adewale, who enjoyed financial support from his kin, was unusual: 'I went August, I came back

October; this year I've gone four times; this year alone, four times'. When he is in Nigeria he spends time with his family celebrating events like the annual family re-union held at his father's house, birthdays, Christmas and New Year holidays. The annual family re-union event draws all family members who live in various parts of the world. During this event his father asks each family member including minor children to narrate their achievements and failures during the past year, outline plans for the New Year and prays for each family member. They attend church services together. Emmanuel returns to Nigeria twice a year. Most men were unable to go home this often. Coffie, for example, visited Ghana in December 2010 but not again until December 2013. Even when fathers are able to return to West Africa, this does not always mean that they have much actual contact with their children. Fram describes how his children are in boarding school and university. During a recent visit to Accra he saw his son once only:

My boy had to leave school that night, he is at boarding school, so he had to leave to see his father but with permission, though it was nearly not granted. He got permission to leave that night and come back the following morning.

Migrant fatherhood has to accommodate and adapt to the children's life stage and activities. If the father was living in Accra he may be unable to see the child, who goes to boarding school, frequently. This reminds us of how concepts such as proximity and co-presence can misguide our understanding of how families operate in practice. Even before moving to Johannesburg, however, he was used to not co-residing with his children and seeing them infrequently. Fram sees being a migrant parent as just another form of physical distance from his children. A few fathers could bring their children to Johannesburg for short visits. But such visits are expensive, disrupt children's schooling, and require that children have passports, so they are burdensome even for this group of middle class fathers.

The migrant fathers therefore use a variety of communication media to build intimacy with their families at home. Whilst no one writes letters now, almost all of the fathers stayed in regular and close contact with their families, primarily through phones, but to a lesser extent using other new media (see Appendix 1). Asked how often he communicated with his family, Sam answered 'three times a week', and explained that he speaks to 'all of them, my wife puts the phone on their ears; my father is there; my brother is also there, so anybody I phone can give them the phone'. Victor uses WhatsApp, SMS and Facebook to communicate with his family. He explained the possible consequence of not keeping in touch: 'If you don't call they think you have forgotten about them and you have started a new family'.

Phoning is easy and immediate: ‘You call, you hear their voice, and you talk’ (Sam). Before his wife moved to Johannesburg to be with him, Aban used to phone her in the morning and after work every day. Because his children were in a boarding school, Aban would call the teacher to find out how the children were doing. He calls the teacher who in turn hands over the phone to the children. If there was any problem at school he would call his wife, and she would attend to it. He thinks his relationship with his children has not been affected as he chats with them regularly, and also communicates with them on WhatsApp and they exchange photos on WhatsApp and Facebook. Coffie phones his family twice a week, and sometimes they phone him. He also communicates with them using WhatsApp, Skype and Viber. ‘Because I’ve been away from them, talking with them often makes me feel good’. The advantage of Skype and Viber is that he can ‘see their faces’. When they communicate, he checks on their health and behaviour as well as whether they are going to school, their performance at school, as well as what time they get home from school. He regularly checks that the children are being collected early from school. He gets upset if they are collected late. He also communicates with his wife’s mother.

Emmanuel communicates with his family through phone calls and BBM (Blackberry-to-Blackberry Messenger). He calls home four or five times per week, and talks with the children at least once a week as well as on special days such as their birthdays. They also ‘chat’ every day on BBM and often exchange photos. Like most of our interviewees, he showed us photos of his children. When he travels to other countries like the USA he buys goods for them, sometimes after consulting with them by sending photos whilst he is in a shop so that they can choose what they want. Fram calls home once a week but uses WhatsApp everyday – although he cannot communicate often with his school-going children – only once every two weeks – because his children are not allowed to use a phone at boarding school. Adewale speaks with his family ‘everyday, everyday; we spoke a few times today; my son ..., he called me again, he said ‘daddy, we are going to market, we’ll speak to you after we come back’. He uses Skype as well as telephones to talk to his siblings in Europe, but he uses telephones only to communicate with his family in Nigeria: ‘My wife calls me, there is no time she can’t call me. She calls me at 1am, I talk to her, 2am, I talk to her. Then work-wise I can call her any time I want to call her’.

Phones and new media allow fathers to continue to exercise moral guardianship, even from afar. Adewale regularly calls his children early in the morning and prays with them. ‘Every morning I call them. ... So whether I’m there, I’m not there, it is like I am there with them. Physically I am not there, spiritually I am there with them’. Different media serve different purposes. Isaac mostly calls using his mobile phone, but also sends SMSs and occasionally uses Facebook to

communicate with his wife. He says that his family needs to hear his voice – i.e. the voice creates a connection – which does not happen through SMSs. He maintains and builds connection both by using multiple media and by using primarily a medium that conveys his voice. Fram also described how his family uses Skype or Tango to ‘console each other in what we’re going through. We encourage one another socially and spiritually’. These examples indicate the different ways in which fathers continue to build closeness with their children and family. He explained how the family prays together on the phone: ‘Because we are Christians too ... we pray together through the phone’. It appears that different forms of media may be used to achieve different forms of closeness or intimacy, i.e. spiritual and emotional connection. Migrant fathers even use new technologies to assist their children doing their school homework. For instance, Sam often assists his daughter to do her homework via the Blackberry chat.

Expressing love and support for the family is being made possible by the access to good communication infrastructure by these middle class, educated fathers in Johannesburg and their urban-based families in West Africa. Migrant fathers made sure that their wives, children and other care givers have easy access to phones and other communication channels. In this way, communication is multi-directional. For example, Isaac bought mobile phones for all his four children in Lagos. Cost remains a concern, because using new media technology can be expensive. Fram communicates with his wife and children everyday using WhatsApp. He explained that new forms of media make it cheaper to communicate: ‘Phoning is expensive. I call my wife once a week but I WhatsApp every day’. Ayodele complained that his wife was ‘not technologically there so that’s the challenge’. He phones his wife every day, but ‘we hope to move to WhatsApp, I am trying to encourage them to go to those platforms’. The general view seems to be that ‘communication is the bedrock of every relationship’, as Sam informed us, and therefore migrant fathers must spend money on communicating with their family members.

West African migrants in Johannesburg have better opportunities than the migrant workers from the Philippines studied by Parreñas. The Philippino migrants battled with poor infrastructure at home, low wages, and working conditions that often inhibited such communication. In contrast, West African migrants in our study enjoyed good communication infrastructure in both Johannesburg and the cities where their families lived. They seem to be able – and willing – to spend money on communication, and their working conditions did not present any obstacles.

4. Discourses of good fathering

Our interviewees seem to have a clear sense of what they consider to be ‘good fathering’. For most of them, this is bound up with a patriarchal Christianity inherited from their own parents, and revolves around teaching respect. Almost all of our interviewees are very critical of parenting and child-raising practices in South Africa, which (our interviewees say) generate disrespect. A culture of children’s rights was widely seen as contributing to delinquency and disrespect among children and adolescents in South Africa.

According to our interviewees, parenting in West Africa entails taking responsibility for teaching children the enduringly important values that your parents taught to you when you were a child, sometimes with some adaptation to the changing times. According to Fram:

Raising children is all about transferring your cultural values, for them to fit into the society, you exposed them to families that have not departed from their values who can transfer those cultural values without any flaw. Which parents are able to transfer to them sincerity, truthfulness and respect for others. Those are the things you have to think about and transmit to them as parents, so that in future your children can be fully integrated into the family system, values of their culture and the Ghanaian system. And if you are a Christian you also look at that direction, what are the values that would make him as Christian. We’re talking about two sets of values here.

Another Ghanaian explained what he understood as good fathering practices and compared these practices and norms of fathering from the previous generation:

We do things quiet different, because my father use to cane us but I don’t cane my children, I speak to them. Some of us feared our fathers because of the cane, but I don’t want my children to fear me, so we sit down and talk and when the children want to say something they feel free to talk.

He emphasised the importance of communicating with his children as a way of working together, being together and setting a good example:

When I go home the children can sit around and we chat, because we’re a team. You grow closer to children in a manner that you can share together. You have to be an example to your children that they have to copy you.

These findings resonate with Ratele *et al.*'s theme of 'talking fathers'. Fatherhood can be a 'dialogical, psychological or 'talking' relationship' and it is this approach that has the ability to work against 'unfair, unequal, punitive, and violent versions of fatherhood' (Ratele *et al.*, 2012: 559).

Practices of child-raising in South Africa are seen to be far removed from the norms passed on from generation to generation in West Africa. Crime posed a general problem. Several interviewees had themselves experienced crime first-hand. 'I was very scared, very terrified', said Ayodele when recalling an incident in which he was robbed. More importantly, however, South Africa is perceived to have a culture of delinquency, with parents passing onto their children both bad behaviours and bad attitudes, especially a lack of respect for adults.

This predominant 'culture' in South Africa contributed to migrants' preference for their children to remain at home in West Africa. 'I don't want to expose my children to South African culture', said Coffie; 'they must grow up under the influence of our culture in Ghana'. For Aban, 'I cannot raise my children in South Africa ... To raise a child here is a problem to me'. 'I don't want to bring or raise my children here', said Emmanuel; 'it is not a suitable environment for my kids'. 'The benefit of raising children at home is that you give them a direction', said Adewale; 'in South Africa here it's like the children does not really have that moral and direction whereas back home there is this moral and direction'. Several interviewees reiterated that they would only bring children to South Africa for short holidays, to avoid their being corrupted. 'They can just visit and go away', Sam said; 'I don't want my children corrupted'.

Many of our interviewed expressed the view that South African parents passed bad habits onto their children. In South Africa, 'you see children smoking', complained Emmanuel. Children in South Africa are exposed to smoking and sex from too young an age, said Adewale. He tells a story about parents giving their young child cigarettes to smoke. 'I looked at these adults, you know I was angry. What kind of upbringing are you bringing that child? Because that child has already started smoking he will end up to be a chain smoker'.

The upbringing of children in this country is too, too bad. You understand. Let's say about 60 percent of parents in this country their upbringing of children is too wrong. Because you have a child... Ok, let's look it from this perspective. God owns children. ... God owns children, you understand? While we the parents we are caretakers. You know what I'm saying? God owns the children. Parents are caretakers we are not the owners. We are not. We are only caretakers. So that is the one reason why being a caretaker you are looking after

something you need to take good care of that particular thing but most parents here what they do they don't take good care of children.

In contrast to their own enduring and stable marriages, our interviewees perceived South Africa to be characterised by divorce and instability. Adewale – a pastor – strongly denounced divorce:

Whenever you go through a divorce it affects these children. Because number one, I have a father, I am divorced, now my daughter will say to me, will say, daddy I want to go see mommy, there is opportunity to go see the mother, the mother will say no, I'm going to daddy. You understand? I've noticed divorce in this country, I've found out, the man does not even talk to the wife. They don't talk to each other. So the children click and take advantage of those things because they will pass to different places even in [inaudible] the father will decide to hook up with one woman somewhere and they are looking for at that point in time because it is a broken home they are looking for where they will get comfort, if there is one woman that just cares a little they'll fly to the house of that man under the present circumstances. At the same time the future of that child has been dented.

South African parents were bad role-models as far as our interviewees were concerned. 'Discipline must start from yourself', said Adewale. 'The bible says you cannot give what you don't have'. Interviewees also worried about laziness. 'South Africa makes people lazy', said Adewale, 'even Nigerians from good homes come to South Africa and end up taking drugs and engaging in crime'. Sam also bemoaned the fact that the matric (or grade 12, school-leaving examination) had been made easier: 'They should set the standard higher for the children to work hard to get there'.

Bad behaviour was widely attributed to the 'rights' accorded to children in South Africa. Migrant fathers deployed an anti-child rights discourse to buttress their argument against raising children in South Africa. Aban was clear that 'I don't like the too many rights given to children. It affects them. In South Africa you see children as young as nine years smoking, drinking beer'. Victor said

I don't like the way they are raising children in South Africa. They are giving children a lot of rights...children are doing whatever they are like. Children at the age of 12 are smoking, they are clubbing...it's going to affect their future.

In Ghana, children who behaved like that would be beaten. In South Africa, however, 'adults cannot beat them as they say it's child abuse'. Similarly,

Emmanuel says that children are permitted to do too much ‘in the name of children’s rights’. Children, he said, ‘are children and are vulnerable to more matured people who can take advantage of them’. Adewale angrily denounced the difficulties in reprimanding physically children in South Africa, because of ‘human rights’ (although he also warned against ‘overfeeding’ children ‘with love’).³

For Sam:

I think SA is the vital society when it comes to higher learning but when it comes to grooming children South Africa is not a good society to go to. When it comes to manners and respect children here don’t have that. South Africans don’t know the value of family, everything is in disarray. South Africans have excessive liberty, where there’s an excessive liberty there’s a breakdown of law because in that liberty you become too lenient and you destroy the future of the children gradually. When you look at this from moral perspective, morally speaking, there are no morals in South Africa.

Kelvin bemoaned that in South Africa, unlike in Nigeria, you cannot ‘caution somebody’s child without the express permission of the parents’. In Nigeria,

I don’t need to know your father, if I see a child doing something wrong I caution the child. I don’t need to know the mother or father, I don’t need to know the parents. It’s just to correct the child. I say “Son, daughter, you shouldn’t be doing this”. If you try some of these things here you might get arrested for child abuse.

In Nigeria, Adewale said:

Anybody in the family can discipline them. One person does not raise a child. One person does not raise a child. If I’m walking now here and I see any child that is doing wrong things, I discipline that child. You know what I’m saying. Straight! So one person does not raise a child.

Coffie also contrasted the ways in which the entire community raises children in Ghana with the situation in South Africa. Adewale relates how a neighbor stopped his son hitting his daughter; when my wife got home, she thanked the

³ Most of the literature in South Africa finds that the older generation in multigenerational households report that their younger household members are no longer obedient or respectful towards seniors (Moller & Sotshongaye, 2002, Mathis, 2011). Mathis and Moller & Sotshongaye found that this had also been attributed to the discourse of rights.

neighbor for intervening. Two fathers raised a note of caution. Ayodele, a PhD student, explained that community members did not have unlimited powers in the way they raised children. Community members were allowed to discipline children, although ‘not necessarily’ through corporal punishment. Kelvin also wanted to limit other people’s roles in raising his children, ‘because it’s my sole responsibility to decide what should be done’.

Children and adolescents in South Africa were said to do things they should not do, but most importantly they were reported to show insufficient respect for adults, as Fram stated:

Let me summarise it in one word, most children that is being raised at home in Nigeria they have respect [claps his hands]. I will give you just a very simple example. I walked into a home in Soweto Protea here in Jo’burg, you understand. When I walked into the house, ... I say “hi how are you?”. “He’s fine”, his mother says. He can’t greet. I say “why he can’t greet?” He says “no, you came in so you are supposed to greet”. This child, a small child! And her daughter is even smaller. I shook my head. It happened here in Joburg. ... My children we don’t do that. If I walk in to this, I’m seated here, my father comes, I say “hello, daddy, welcome”. [Shouting] I greet my dad, not my dad to greet me. Ja. If my father, for instance, my father walks into this house this that that, I greet him. Even up to now, ... I say “okay daddy this that” ..., “daddy welcome, welcome, welcome” [shouting]. We don’t sit for our father to come and greet us. It doesn’t work! We greet him. But here being and adult in the country you are supposed to greet the kids. It doesn’t work like that. There is no sign of respect there. So when you bring children up in Nigeria there is this morals in them and respect. That is how it is.

Fram also attributed children’s lack of respect for elders and their lack of discipline to their having too many rights, which was linked somehow to what he called ‘white cultural practices’.

I don’t think children here get much parental care, because of the laws in this country, that permits the child to report the parent if the parent punishes him. I think they are trying to force people here in a wrong way to imitate the culture of the whites. Look at the way some of those kids speak, it’s not natural, they’re trying to imitate the whites. I see that the kind of respect for the elderly, it’s not there.

Ayodele dissented partially from this predominant view. He described ‘our system’ of child-raising in Nigeria as ‘maybe a bit conservative: We need to let

our children speak more. I think that's one positive here that the children's voices are allowed'. Nigerians were, he suggested, too fond of corporate punishment. Aban also lauded South African schools for preparing children to be confident and to express themselves well.

The one clear advantage that South Africa had over Nigeria and Ghana was the perceived quality of schools. Nigerian public schools are said to be poor (by Adewale and Kelvin), whereas South African education is 'recognised' internationally (Aban). Opeyemi also pointed to the benefits of better infrastructure – he mentioned consistent availability of electricity – which enabled children in South Africa to spend more time on their school work than their counterparts in West Africa.

5. Conclusion

Most of our interviewees shared an understanding of their responsibilities as fathers that went far beyond merely economic provision. Most significantly, the fathers demonstrated how they practiced closeness and how they maintained and built relations with family members in Ghana and Nigeria.

The web of supportive kin, in securing fatherhood, was a key part of how fathers undertook transnational fathering. In providing economically, they had support from kin members as a result. These fathers were not solely responsible for breadwinning and were thus supported in performing this role. In comparison to the existing literature on transnational fathering, economic provision was not the only way in which fathers performed transnational parenting.

The web of supportive kin is especially important for our migrant fathers, and is an important difference between the experiences of migrants from West Africa and those from other parts of the world. The network of adults looking after their children at home shaped which duties fathers themselves were required to perform. In Adewale's case, for example, his wife was looking after their children with support from his mother and sister. These family members, as well as his other siblings, assist with childcare, transport, money for school fees and books, as well as 'moral support': 'They don't want me to, you know, fret about anything.' If he cannot pray with his children over the telephone, and his wife is away, then some other family member will lead prayers. Victor told us that his wife and mother shared the responsibility for disciplining his children. The web of kin means that these men, who are not poor, do not need to resort to the market for childcare. The web of support extended to non-kin in the home country, as many fathers sent their children to boarding school. Although this arrangement might seem like a market arrangement, the fathers do not seem to

see it quite that way. Teachers seem to be perceived as responsible adults who had close relationships with the migrant fathers; they were not seen as employees. Aban says that he takes presents for the teachers when he goes home, in much the same way as he takes gifts for his kin.

The findings showed that the fathers understood that they had responsibilities as guardians and teachers to pass onto their children the basic values taught to them by their own parents, perhaps with some minor modifications in response to changing times. These responsibilities could not be effected if children accompanied their fathers to Johannesburg, in large part because South Africa was not considered a suitable place to raise children. South African culture tolerated or even generated widespread delinquency and disrespectful behaviours and attitudes. Instead, our sample of fathers negotiated with wives, maternal and paternal kin, and school teachers, over ways of ensuring their children were disciplined. In fact, these negotiations included diverging opinions about how a dispute should be resolved or what decision should be taken. Regarding the role of corporeal punishment, some fathers had to negotiate for a change in the way in which discipline is enacted. Migrant fathers demonstrated a significant move away from conventional forms of asserting authority and are bringing new ways of listening and talking to both wives and children when disciplining their offspring.

Our interviewees did not worry much about their children back in West Africa, because they were generally being raised there in good ways, despite the physical absence of their fathers. Resonating with other research involving Ghanaian migrants (Coe, 2011a), our findings highlight the shortcomings of focusing on co-presence and proximity as a normative family practice that is disrupted when parents are transnationalised. In reality, many of the parents in the sample would not be co-residing with their children even if they were living permanently in Ghana or Nigeria.

Child-raising in Ghana and Nigeria was considered successful for two major reasons. First, parents could draw on dense webs of supporters, mostly, but not only, kin. Secondly, they could play an active part in their children's lives through using new communications media, such as mobile phones, Skype, SMSs, WhatsApp, Instagram, and so on. This finding thus complicates conventional perceptions of cultivating closeness between parents and children as women's work.

The conventional wisdom on transnational migrants from the global South is that women do the emotional work whilst men provide economically. Dreby argues that 'mothers' relationships with their children in Mexico are highly dependent on demonstrating emotional intimacy from a distance, whereas

fathers' relationships lie in their economic success as migrant workers' (Dreby, 2006: 34). Likewise, Abrego (2009) observed that Salvadoran transnational mothers firmly maintained their caregiving responsibilities from afar via their selfless commitment to their children's wellbeing. Men, Abrego noted, did not. Our interviewees highlighted how fathers maintain and build closeness through regular communication, prayer, consolation and talk. The ways in which fathers used and managed new forms of communication technology allowed for multi-directional and regular, albeit it not always instant, communication. Although our findings are based on a sample of middle-class and well-resourced fathers where the transnational family is located only in the urban setting, we found that men are undertaking the work of communication and closeness in ways that build intimacy. These findings challenge the belief that transnational fathers do not perform emotion work and intimate labour as migrant fathers. West African fathers, who are living in South Africa, relied on communication technologies to enact good fathering, not only to ensure discipline, but also to console, support and pray with their children and kin. This suggests that the transnational communication patterns of West African fathers living in South Africa move beyond conventional understandings of fathering and reach out to ways of talking, listening and supporting their offspring. In doing so, these transnational fathers seem to be in the process of renegotiating what it means to be good fathers, making themselves emotionally, and at least semi-physically available (albeit virtually), to their families at all times.

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Appendix 1: Use of New Media

#	Interviewee	Landline	Mobile	Smart phone	WhatsApp	BBM	SMS texting	MixIt	Facebook	Skype	Viber	Instagram	Email	Other (specify)
4	Aban		Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes					
5	Coffie		Yes	Yes	Yes					Yes	Yes			
6	Fram		Yes	Yes	Yes					Yes				Tango
7	Kwasi		Yes	Yes	Yes									
11	Emmanuel		Yes	Yes	Yes									Jumblo
12	Victor		Yes		Yes									
13	Sam		Yes	Yes						Yes			Yes	
14	Isaac		Yes	Yes		Yes								
15	Adewale		Yes											
16	Kelvin		Yes											
17	Goodwin		Yes	Yes										
18	Opeyemi		Yes											
19	Ayodele		Yes											