

## **Fragmented Homes and Dispersed Identities: The Dual Burden of African Diasporic Migration**

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### **Abstract**

Migration has long been a defining factor in shaping African families, with economic and socio-political factors driving movement from the continent to different parts of the world. While migration offers financial stability, it also comes at a social cost - disrupting traditional family structures and weakening kinship ties. Second-generation migrants often struggle to navigate their hybrid identities, caught between their ancestral heritage and the cultural expectations of their host societies. This study explores the long-term implications of African transnational migration on family unity, cultural preservation, and identity formation. It particularly examines the experiences of children growing up as “transnational orphans” and the evolving concept of “home” in the African diaspora. This study adopts the use of historical approach in gathering and interpretation of data. This includes the use of both primary and secondary data. Primary data includes Interviews, Secondary data include books, journals among others. It also made use of a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews and case studies to explore personal migration experiences.

**Keywords:** Migration, African Diaspora, Identities, Economic stability, Family Structures

## Introduction

The African diaspora is expanding across multiple continents, creating complex family arrangements where immediate family members live in different countries. Many migrants leave their home countries with the hope of returning, but over time, factors such as career stability, children's education, and robust integration into the host society makes returning impractical. Thus, making the dual burden of African Diasporic Migration apparent which is the hidden social costs of migration, particularly its impact on African family dynamics and identity formation. In a bid to better understand the dual burden of African Diasporic Migration, there is a need to understand the concepts, thus, this chapter comprises four parts the first deals with conceptualization and definitions, the second is a historical overview of African Diasporic migration. In the third part, the experiences of African transnational migrants, is viewed, the challenges faced by African transnational migrants, the implications of African transnational migration on African family and kingship were also discussed here. The fourth part speaks to the possible Panacea in tackling the realities of African Diasporic migration and the concluding part.

## Conceptual Clarification

### Migration

Migration is a complex phenomenon that is driven by socio-economic, political, demographic and environmental situations.<sup>1</sup> In simple terms, it is the movement of people from one place to another with the intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily at a new location.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, these people move from their birth place to other place often driven by opportunities in other countries and sometimes by poverty, unemployment, conflicts, and environmental degradation.<sup>3</sup>

Migration is as old as human existence. It typifies the movement of people from one place to another, as it was viewed as part and parcel of human evolution, which eventually ended with the Homo sapiens. (Hein de Haas, 2014). Migration, according to Kirwin and Anderson (2018), is the movement of people from one place to another with the intention of settling permanently or temporarily at a new location. The movement is often over long or short distances and from one country to another. People may migrate as individuals, in family units, or in large groups.

According to the most recent estimates, 3.6% of the world's population or 281 million international migrants in 2020 lives in countries other than those of their birth, which is over three times the estimated amount in 1970 and 128 million more than in 1990 (IOM Report, 2022). Retrospectively, making sense of the contemporary emerging patterns, shifting demographics in relation to global social and economic transformations as well as changing environmental circumstances would be better and effectively understood through the concept of migration.

The multifaceted nature of migration, both in its features and outcomes, makes for its proximity to concepts such as economics: its impact on the economy, include issues such as labor markets, how much money is sent home, and how much it boosts the economies of both the sending and receiving countries. It also creates cultural diversity by facilitating the interchange of beliefs and customs among various communities, leading to advantages and difficulties in relation to identity and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Castelli, F. (2018). Drivers of migration: why do people move? *Journal of travel medicine*, 25(1)

<sup>2</sup> Kundu, R. (2024). A Study on Internal Migration In India. *International journal of food and nutritional sciences*

<sup>3</sup> Labonte, Rand Ruckert A. (2019). Migration. *Health Equity in a Globalizing Era*.

simulations. Other subjects such as diaspora, transnational issues and border control share nexus with migration.

### **Identity/Identities**

Identity is a dynamic construct and in the context of this work, it simply discusses how individuals and groups define themselves and are perceived by others. Identities are the meanings individuals attach to themselves and their construction process have implications for individuals, group and organizational outcome.<sup>4</sup>

### **Diasporic Migration**

Diasporic migration refers to the relationship migrants share with their home of origin.<sup>5</sup>

### **African Diaspora**

African diaspora in simple terms can be conceptualized as the movement of African descent outside their ancestral continent.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Historical Overview of African Diasporic Migration**

Migration is not a recent phenomenon and has been present since the emergence of mankind. In relation to African Diasporic migration, it has been divided into Key periods such as the Early migration period dated to about 100,000 years ago, The transatlantic Slave trade to the America in 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Indian Ocean Slave Trade to Asia between 1500 to 1900, Then there was the trans-Saharan slave trade. Other historical period in relation to the African diasporic migration is post abolition migration, and the migration that happened during colonialism.<sup>7</sup> Then the recent one is the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century migration, this is recognized as the contemporary movement. Some scholars have divided African Diaspora as Old African Diaspora and New African Diaspora.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to this work the African Diasporic Migration that is focused on is the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century migration. It has been documented that in the 1970s and 1980s. there was a noticeable increase in the numbers of immigrants moving to other European countries, for instance between 1991 and 2001, the African population in Britain rose from 214,000 to 514,000 which was a 140 percent rise. There is also rapid growth of African migration to North America especially the United States of America.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brown, A. (2018). Identities in organizations. *Human Relations*, 71, 611 - 613.

<sup>5</sup> Vertovec, S., & Cohen, R. (2001). Migration, diasporas and transnationalism. *Anthropologica*, 43, 291

<sup>6</sup> Palmer, C. (2000). Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora. *The Journal of Negro History*, 85, 27 - 32

<sup>7</sup> Zeleza, P. T. (2005). Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic. *African Affairs*, 104(414) p42

<sup>8</sup> Salau, M. (2018). African Diasporas: History and Historiography. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*

<sup>9</sup> Zeleza, P. T. (2005). Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic. *African Affairs*, 104(414) P60-62

## Experiences of African Transnational Migrant

**THINGS FALL APART!!!**  
*Many African families will never be together again!  
Not because they don't want to be -  
but because they cannot ever be together again.*

Firstborn is in Canada.  
The second born is in Dubai.  
The third born is in Australia.  
Fourth born is in New York.  
The last born is in the UK.

Parents are in Africa, making trips once in a while  
to see them in different countries.

They are all getting married and having children  
who will never really meet or know each other -  
virtual cousins!! Their best shot is group video  
calls which will rarely happen because there's no  
convenient regular time that works for everybody  
due to different global time zones.

When their parents die, their homes become  
desolate, and in no time, the family name becomes  
a distant memory.

They've had to travel because Africa failed them,  
and they needed to leave for another country  
where they could have a shot at life and their  
children won't suffer what they went through.

This is the high price of migration that you can  
never put a financial value on that very few people  
talk about. The destruction of families and the  
tearing apart of siblings. This is the silent evil that  
our leadership has bequeathed to us all. Even their  
own families are not left out. One day, we will  
realize the extent of the damage and the  
destruction that we have done to ourselves.

*Source: Authors' compilation (A pictorial presentation of Four Oral Interviews conducted on the  
experiences of Nigerians in the Diaspora in 2024)*

## **The Challenges faced by African Transnational Migrants**

Problem of blending into their new society

Migration trends induced by economic reasons has become a key part of contemporary account of many African migrants. As the world economy demands more workers who can adapt, migrating tend to offer additional chances to attain financial stability and live better, than what is readily available at home. Migrating seems to provide the means of survival in the events of few jobs, low pay, and economic downturns at home. But while migrating might solve money problems, it comes with emotional costs of family splits. Being separated from siblings, kids, and older parents causes deep emotional and mental pain. The physical distance, differences in time zones and work demands make it hard to keep close emotional ties, creating gaps in space and culture, this explains the emotional toil experienced in the attempt to bridge geographical and cultural divides.

The rise of 'transnational orphans' is a growing outcome of these migratory patterns where parents relocate abroad in search of greener pasture - juicy work, leaving their children back at home. This circumstance usually initiates the weakening of extended family networks, as relatives who step in to care for these children often face their own set of challenges, and the emotional and social well-being of the children can be severely affected by the absence of their immediate parents.

## **Loss of culture**

The migratory trend of Africans to Europe, America, and other Western regions, christened 'Japa syndrome,' illustrates a larger global trend where migration, while providing economic opportunities, simultaneously accelerates the process of cultural assimilation and sometimes erasure. This cultural shift can have long-term effects, changing not only individual identities but also the collective cultural heritage of African diaspora communities. Especially when a sense of disorientation when exposed to unfamiliar values, norms, and lifestyles.

In the case of many first-generation migrants, the clash between the values of their home countries and those of their host nations can be overwhelming, leading to a struggle to maintain their cultural identities while adapting to new ways of life. The loss or subsumption of culture usually manifests in the adoption of foreign practices, languages, and social norms, sometimes at the expense of indigenous customs, languages, and traditions. This assimilation can create generational divides, with younger migrants more likely to embrace Westernized lifestyles, while older generations attempt to preserve their cultural heritage. Over time, this can result in a diminished sense of connection to ancestral roots, as the younger generation navigates between two cultures, often without fully integrating into either.

## **The Identity Struggles of African Migrants Across Borders**

African migrants stand out not across borders, but also across identities. Their names, languages, and memories spanning national boundaries often create meanings that people misunderstand, simplify, or ignore. At its core, migration from more or advantaged areas results in better settlement experiences in their new countries. Africans often face the twin challenge of being too visible and invisible at the same time - viewed as different, yet rarely recognized for their true selves.

In Europe African migrants walk a path lined with colonial impressions. Be it France, Germany, or Italy, the shadow of empire looms large. Here, an engineer from Ivory Coast or a nurse from Cameroon might receive reminders - in subtle or obvious ways - that their stay has conditions, and people always judge their contributions against a backdrop of national anxiety. Steps to fit in prove difficult, as speaking French without an accent or wearing plain clothes becomes more than a choice - it turns into a way to survive. Identity in such cases is fractured. Migrants are forced to hold on to their background in the home and learn to suppress it in the public. Cultural pride is then something performed with caution -in food cooked in the home, music at weddings, or in coded language in a native tongue. The



inner turmoil grows worse when children are born in the host country and master its language but remain foreign. There, the second generation inherit not only the aspirations of their parents, but their displacement.

In these spaces, African identity is reduced to economic utility, and along with it, the psychic condition of invisibility becomes a heightened reality. Names become unspeakable. Histories are invalidated. The deep sense of being 'replaceable' gets internalized into the migrant consciousness. But through WhatsApp groups, Sunday church, or remittances sent quietly with pride, migrants reclaim their humanity and sustain their identity, even in shards. Despite all the obstacles, African migrants are not so much victims of displacement as they are artisans of hybrid identities. They build communities in time zones, raise trilingual children, and become cultures that cannot be tied to a place. Through resilience and reinvention, they redefine belonging.

In every host country, identity is a rebellion in silence - an insistence on being here and there, foreign and native, broken and whole. And in that insistence lies not just struggle, but deep and increasing power.

#### The Psychological Effects of Transnational Family Disruption on African Diasporas

Transnational family separation is a characteristic aspect of much African migrant life, wherein economic, political, or educational necessity compels individuals to depart from their families to settle elsewhere. Although the economic remittances sent back home may keep whole communities alive, the psychological impact on both the migrants and their families is a less visible cost. Such separation, usually extended and uncertain, results in a multifaceted mix of emotional tension, identity dissonance, and intergenerational effects.

Constant emotional tension is a psychological effect of transnational displacement among African migrants, they also experience long-term guilt, loneliness, and helplessness. Some are troubled by the dilemma of physical distance and emotional presence in the events of the members of their family who remained at home. The fact of absence at milestones events; births, deaths, graduations, weddings - can result in a lasting feeling of absence and failure, although the migrant might be economically contributory.

For spouses or children left behind in the home country, loss of a parent or spouse can leave one with a sense of abandonment, resentment, or confusion. This is particularly effective when the period of separation is unspecified, which typically is the case due to visa restrictions, financial instability, or political barriers

For those migrants raising children in host countries but still maintaining connections with family in the home country, there is generally tension between cultural expectations and day-to-day reality. Parents are able to maintain cultural values from home, attempting to transmit them to children growing up in widely divergent social and educational environments. This is a source of psychological tension for both parents and children, whose identities are being developed within two often clashing systems of culture.

Transnational family separation also affects men and women in different ways. For most African women migrants, particularly those who are caregivers or work in domestic jobs overseas, there is a significant emotional load associated with their gendered role as mothers and caregivers. Leaving home often evokes social disapproval, and communities even see them as forgoing motherhood duties despite remittances earned.

Conversely, African men also suffer from psychological stress related to the expectation to act as economic providers. In failure to carry out these expectations on a daily basis, they fall victim to shame. Both scenarios create internalized pressures that strengthen mental health weaknesses in most instances in secret due to cultural prohibitions on emotional expression.

### **The Effect and Implications of African Transnational Migration on African Family and Kinship**

There have been several implication and effect of transnational Migration on the different African Family, home and abroad and this affects the Kinship. The first and notable effect is distance between families. This distance has affected the long-term sustainability of African family unity and networks. It cannot be overlooked that migrants have had to maintain multiple ties across different countries.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Creation of Virtual kinship:**

In a bid to maintain a form of family ties and kinship despite the distance, family and parents have leaned into digital communication. This is because digital communication plays a role in maintaining transnational family ties, and is it an effective substitute for physical presence. Example of these is the role of WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Meet and other social media platforms in maintaining family ties. The benefits of digital communication in sustaining family bonds across borders cannot be overlooked as kins and family far and wide will know each other's names, identify each other facially despite having no physical meeting. If the family members eventually meet, they would not be total strangers. The challenges of digital communication most times is the different time zones, take for instance the, the case of four direct siblings whose pursuit of career opportunities and better standard of living took them to three different continents respectively; namely, Germany, Canada, United States and South Africa respectively. They now have their individual families and raising children, these children who are first cousins live in different time zones, their grandparents also hardly get to relate with them. In no time, the bond wanes and at best they become virtual cousins.

#### **Identity Formation and Hybrid Identities**

Due to the Hybrid identities that emerges due to migration, there is an implication on the culture and African cultural preservation. This is evident especially second-generation migrants merge African and Western cultural influences.

#### **The presence of Cultural Duality and A need for Cultural Preservation**

The presence of Cultural duality stems from being born As an African and living in a foreign land, this mostly applies to the second-generation migrants have to navigate cultural duality. A question that comes to mind is how African migrants transmit cultural values, traditions, and language to their children?

Dispersed communities have strived to retain their cultural heritage despite geographic separation.<sup>11</sup> through several means one of which is joining groups, associations and becoming members and individuals also join cultural affiliations to better define themselves.<sup>12</sup> For Example in United

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<sup>10</sup> Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nation-states*. Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, R. (2008). *Global diasporas: An introduction*. Routledge

<sup>12</sup> Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 2(1), 7-24.

Kingdom, different countries and tribes form group and branches of a tribe or culture e.g. Central Association of Nigerians in the UK (Canuk) which was formed in 2005 as an umbrella body representing all Nigerians in the United Kingdom.<sup>13</sup> For tribe and cultural affiliation, there is another example of The National Association of Nigerian Communities NANC in UK which plays a crucial role in celebrating Nigeria rich cultural heritage while preserving and promoting the welfare and integration of Nigerians in their adopted homeland.<sup>14</sup> For community and tribe groups, there is an example of Ndokwa Association UK London which is a community group set up in UK since 2009 to support Ndokwa Indigenes residing in the UK.<sup>15</sup> All these bodies are formed and joined by to retain cultural heritage.

### **Another effect is the of Economic security against emotional loss**

An implication of African transnational migration on African Family and Kingship is economic security but sometimes, it comes at the detriment of emotion loss. One cannot overlook the fact that the economic necessity of migration comes at an emotional cost of family separation and despite the remittances back to the family, it is hard to sustain the emotional bonds. Despite the financial success, the family cohesion is affected and the “Transnational orphans” experience weakens the extended family networks.

### **Reconceptualizing home**

Most times when An African migrant have stayed for a while in the foreign country, there is a shift on what “home” is viewed and the African migrants tends to redefine ‘home’ based on lived experiences. In order words, Families tend to reconceptualize the perception of "home" and this have evolved across generations in African migrant families. Thus, it is important to note that the evolving concept of "home" among African diaspora families has become a factor that influences certain decisions with regard to either permanently settle or return to the motherland.

Looking at the Diaspora theory and the definition of diaspora, return is part of the alethiology of the concept and the diasporas find strong relationship to the homeland and have an aspiration to return.<sup>16</sup> With that being said, many African migrants express a desire to return home, but very few actually do, and these is because of several reasons such as reconceptualization o home, the presence of legal, economic, and emotional barriers to return migration. Thus there is a shift from return migration to transnational lifestyles.

Seemingly, returns are not restricted to members of Diaspora societies. People with Diaspora and non-Diaspora backgrounds alike embark on return journeys, typically by (re)visiting their hometown or places where their grandparents lived, to rediscover or uncover individual biographies and family histories that can illuminate larger social and historical phenomena (Bartov 2007; Eribon 2013; Sands 2016). However, notions of returning to an ancestral homeland are particularly significant and ethically charged with Diasporas, decisively informing collective memories as well as moral and political imaginaries. ‘The homeland’ is central to the actual or imagined returns of migrants, and it is this form

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<sup>13</sup> . Central Association of Nigerians in the UK ( Canuk) website accessed 1/4/2025

<sup>14</sup> The National Association of Nigerian Communities NANC in UK website accessed 1/4/2025

<sup>15</sup> Ndokwa Association UK London website accessed 1/4/2025

<sup>16</sup> King, R., & Christou, A. (2010). Diaspora, migration and transnationalism: Insights from the study of second-generation ‘returnees.’ In R. Bauböck & T. Faist (Eds.), *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods* p 172



of geographic return as being constitutive of processes of identity maintenance that is a recurrent theme in the existing scholarly literatures on migration.

### **Possible Panacea to Tackling the Realities of African Diasporic Migration Fragmented Homes and a Dispersed Identities:**

The long-term implications of African transnational migration on family unity, cultural preservation, and identity formation cannot be overlooked, thus there is a need to recognize a possible form of panacea. Some migrant parents in a bid to preserve cultural identity among their children in diaspora communities use some strategies such as joining relevant groups and cultural association. Other Panacea includes:

- Governments should strengthen diaspora engagement policies to foster cultural preservation.
- African communities in the diaspora should establish cultural mentorship programs for second-generation migrants.
- Host countries should support multicultural integration policies that acknowledge the unique identity struggles of African migrants.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, migration no doubt stimulates economic stability but also distort family cohesion and identity preservation. The rather adverse impact of African transnational migration on the traditional buildup of family bond, affinity and structures is palpable, making inter-generational relationships almost unsustainable. While digital communication helps maintain interactions, it does not suffice the physical presence in kinship relations. The idea of ‘return’ has become more symbolic than practical for many African migrants, thus forming a respite for the disconnect with kinsmen and validating pleasant memories of younger days. There is a Dual Burden of African Diasporic Migration which though it sorts economic stability challenges, it also create fundamental long-term implications for African transnational migration in the form of family unity, cultural preservation, and identity formation which have created Fragmented Homes and Dispersed Identities among the African Migrants.

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