



Changing Notions of Kinship and Family in Contemporary Urban Africa

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Abstract

This study investigates the changing nature of kinship and family structures in urban Africa, focusing on the influence of urbanization, migration, and globalization on traditional family arrangements. The research aims to explore how these factors contribute to the redefinition of family and kinship in urban African settings. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews across four major African cities: Lagos, Nairobi, Johannesburg, and Accra. The results reveal a shift from traditional extended family systems to more nuclear family structures, with non-biological kin increasingly recognized as integral to family life. Migration plays a significant role in this transformation, as individuals maintain kinship bonds through remittances and digital communication despite geographical separation. Gender roles within the family also show signs of transformation, with men becoming more involved in caregiving and domestic duties in urban areas. These findings contribute to the understanding of kinship in urban Africa, emphasizing the flexibility and adaptability of family structures in response to modern socio-economic pressures. The study calls for policies that recognize the diversity of family forms and promote gender equality in caregiving roles. Further research is needed to explore the long-term socio-economic effects of these changes, particularly regarding migration and non-biological kin.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of kinship and family has undergone significant transformations across the globe, and this shift is particularly evident in the context of contemporary urban Africa. Traditionally, kinship in many African societies was based on extended family structures, where individuals lived within close-knit communities and familial bonds played a central role in shaping social, economic, and political life. These familial ties were often reinforced by customary laws and practices that emphasized collective responsibility, social solidarity, and the maintenance of cultural traditions (Goody, 1982; Pomalingo & Nusi, 2024; Wardi et al., 2024). However, with the rapid urbanization and globalization that have characterized much of Africa in the past few decades, the traditional forms of kinship and family structures have been challenged by changing socio-economic conditions, cultural dynamics, and the influence of

Western ideologies. This has led to a redefinition of family roles and relationships, resulting in new forms of kinship that reflect both local traditions and global influences (Wijaya 2023; Adaki, 2023; Carvalho & Casimiro, 2023). Understanding these changes is crucial for analyzing the broader societal transformations occurring in urban Africa today.

Urbanization in Africa, particularly in cities like Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg, has significantly altered the way kinship is structured and practiced. As people migrate from rural areas to urban centers in search of better economic opportunities, traditional family structures have been displaced or reconfigured to accommodate new living conditions and economic realities (Lugo-Espinosa et al., 2024; Ahmed, 2024; Woldesenbet Beta, 2025). The rise of nuclear families in urban settings, as well as the increasing individualization of social relations, stands in contrast to the extended family systems that were once the hallmark of rural African life. Furthermore, the influence of globalization and modernity has led to the incorporation of Western values surrounding marriage, parenting, and gender roles into African family life, creating a hybridization of family practices. This dynamic has sparked a reassessment of what constitutes kinship in contemporary African societies and has led to the emergence of new forms of family organization that blend traditional and modern elements. As such, the study of kinship and family in urban Africa is not only important for understanding cultural change but also for examining the broader socio-economic forces that shape the lives of individuals and communities in African cities (Kajiita & Kang'ethe, 2024; Hoelscher et al., 2023).

The main research problem addressed in this study is the changing nature of kinship and family in contemporary urban Africa, specifically in light of urbanization, migration, and globalization. This research seeks to explore how these factors influence family dynamics, relationships, and structures, and how urban Africans navigate the tensions between traditional kinship systems and the demands of modern urban life. In particular, the study examines how urban residents in Africa have adapted their understanding of kinship and family to address the complexities of urban living, including economic pressures, shifting gender roles, and evolving family forms (Haq, 2024; Avogo, 2025). Previous research has provided valuable insights into these issues, but much of the literature focuses on specific regions or countries, often overlooking the broader continent-wide patterns and trends that may be shaping kinship in African cities. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of urban kinship practices across different African cities, examining the commonalities and differences in how kinship is understood and practiced in diverse urban contexts.

A general solution to the problems identified in this research could involve a deeper understanding of how globalization, urbanization, and migration intersect to influence kinship structures in urban Africa. Existing literature has pointed to the fact that urbanization often leads to a weakening of traditional extended family networks, as individuals become more focused on nuclear family arrangements (Tagnan et al., 2022). These changes, however, do not signal the complete breakdown of kinship ties; rather, they suggest a shift toward more fluid and adaptable forms of family organization. As cities grow and become more complex, new forms of social networks emerge, including chosen families and non-biological kinship ties, which are particularly important in urban African contexts where migration patterns often separate people from their traditional family structures (Morison et al., 2019; Babu & Blount-Hill, 2025). In this light, the role of the urban environment itself must be examined to understand how it shapes and is shaped by these new kinship arrangements. A comprehensive approach to studying these changes would involve exploring both the local cultural norms and the global forces at play in shaping family life in contemporary African cities.

More specifically, scholars have pointed out that kinship in urban Africa is increasingly characterized by the fluidity of family roles and relationships, influenced by both material factors such as economic opportunities and social changes, and symbolic factors such as shifts in ideas about individual rights and responsibilities. For example, in the context of migration, individuals often redefine their relationships with extended family members, such as cousins, uncles, and aunts, and prioritize nuclear family members or individuals with whom they share close economic and emotional ties (Bledsoe & Pison, 1994). Additionally, urbanization often leads to the formation of new family structures that are not based on blood relations but are formed through shared experiences, such as friendship, work, or even co-residence in the same urban neighborhood (Madhavan & Schatz, 2007). The shift toward non-biological kinship networks has important implications for understanding how Africans in urban areas navigate issues of family support, caregiving, and intergenerational relationships.

In reviewing the literature on kinship in urban Africa, several key studies highlight the importance of these transformations. For instance, Goody's (1982) work on the sociology of kinship in West Africa highlights the tension between traditional kinship systems and the pressures of modernization. Similarly, works by Bledsoe and Pison (1994) explore the evolving nature of family relationships in the context of migration in West Africa, while Madhavan (2012) provides an analysis of how urban African families adapt to new realities, particularly in terms of marriage, fertility, and childrearing. These studies show that while traditional kinship ties may be weakening in the face of urbanization, they are not being entirely replaced; rather, they are transforming into new forms that reflect the changing social and economic realities of urban life. However, despite these valuable contributions, gaps remain in understanding the full extent of this transformation across Africa, particularly in comparing different cities and regions that may have distinct urbanization trajectories and cultural contexts.

The purpose of this study is to examine the changing notions of kinship and family in contemporary urban Africa by focusing on the impact of urbanization, migration, and globalization on family structures. Specifically, this research seeks to investigate how these factors contribute to the reconfiguration of kinship in African cities and to explore the different forms of family relationships that emerge as a result. The novelty of this research lies in its comparative approach, which aims to understand how different urban centers in Africa are experiencing these changes, while also recognizing the local cultural nuances that shape these processes. The study will also examine how these transformations in kinship affect individuals' social identity, family roles, and gender dynamics in urban African settings.

METHODS

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the evolving nature of kinship and family in contemporary urban Africa. The research design integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of how urbanization, migration, and globalization are transforming kinship structures and family relationships. The combination of these methods enables both broad generalizations and in-depth insights, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the complex dynamics shaping kinship practices in African cities. By starting with a quantitative survey, the study captures general trends in kinship practices, and subsequent qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to explore these trends more deeply, enriching the findings with personal, lived experiences that offer further context. This sequential design ensures data triangulation, enhancing both the validity and reliability of the research.

The sampling strategy for this study involves a combination of stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. The initial sample is drawn from urban centers across Africa, specifically focusing on cities such as Lagos (Nigeria), Nairobi (Kenya), Johannesburg (South Africa), and Accra (Ghana). These cities were selected due to their varied socio-economic and cultural characteristics, as well as their different levels of urbanization and globalization. The sample is stratified based on factors such as socio-economic class, gender, and migration status, ensuring that both migrant and non-migrant populations are represented. The survey sample consists of 1,000 participants, with equal representation from men and women and individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds. Participants are selected from different neighborhoods within each city to ensure diversity, ranging from informal settlements to more affluent urban areas. This approach provides a comprehensive picture of the factors influencing family relationships in various social contexts. After the initial survey, purposive sampling is used to select 40 participants for in-depth qualitative interviews. These individuals are chosen based on their migration status, family structure, and willingness to share their experiences. The interviews focus on themes such as the role of extended family, gender roles within the family, the impact of migration on family relationships, and the integration of traditional and modern family practices.

Data collection for this study consists of both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The quantitative data is gathered through a structured questionnaire administered to the 1,000 survey participants. The questionnaire includes both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, designed to assess factors such as family composition, migration patterns, gender roles, and perceptions of kinship. The survey examines respondents' family structures, the influence of migration, the impact of urbanization on family roles, and respondents' views on kinship in modern society. The survey instrument is pre-tested in one urban center to ensure reliability and validity. Reliability is assessed using Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency, and content validity is ensured through expert review by specialists in African kinship and family structures. Once finalized, the questionnaire is administered in person or online, depending on the preferences of the respondents.

The qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews with 40 purposively selected participants. These interviews allow participants to share detailed personal experiences and perspectives on kinship and family life in urban Africa. The semi-structured format of the interviews allows flexibility in exploring different topics while maintaining focus on the research questions. The interviews explore themes such as family composition, the changing roles of men and women within the family, the impact of migration on family dynamics, and the ways in which individuals blend traditional African family practices with modern ideals. The interviews also examine the role of non-biological kin, such as friends and neighbors, in family networks, as well as the influence of globalization on family structures. Interviews are conducted in the participants' preferred languages and are recorded with their consent. The transcripts are transcribed verbatim and analyzed for key themes related to the research questions.

The quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, are used to summarize the data and identify general patterns in kinship and family structures. Chi-square tests are used to assess the relationships between variables such as migration status, family composition, and perceptions of kinship. Regression analysis is employed to examine the influence of urbanization and globalization on family roles and kinship practices, helping to understand how these factors shape family dynamics in urban Africa. The qualitative data is analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of recurring themes

and patterns in the interview transcripts. The analysis follows an inductive approach, where themes emerge directly from the data, without pre-imposing any predefined categories. The interviews are first coded, and the codes are grouped into broader themes that reflect the research questions. This method of analysis enables the researcher to explore in depth the experiences and perspectives of the participants, providing rich insights into the changing nature of kinship in urban Africa.

Ethical considerations are central to this study. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before data collection, and participants are informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality is maintained by anonymizing all data, and pseudonyms are used in all reports and publications to protect participants' identities. Data is stored securely, with access restricted to the research team. The study complies with the ethical guidelines established by the institutional review board, ensuring that participants' rights and welfare are protected throughout the research process. Ethical practices also include ensuring that participants fully understand the purpose of the study and how their data will be used, with a clear commitment to transparency throughout the research process.

While the methodology provides a robust framework for understanding kinship and family dynamics in urban Africa, several limitations must be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported data in both the surveys and interviews may introduce biases, as participants may present their family structures or relationships in socially desirable ways. Additionally, the study focuses on urban settings and may not fully capture the experiences of individuals living in rural or peri-urban areas, where family structures may remain more traditional. Despite these limitations, the study's comparative approach, combined with both quantitative and qualitative data, offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of kinship and family in urban Africa. The mixed-methods design ensures that the findings are both broad in scope and rich in detail, making an important contribution to the literature on kinship and family dynamics in Africa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on the evolving nature of kinship and family in contemporary urban Africa, based on data collected through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The analysis reveals key trends and insights into how urbanization, migration, and globalization are transforming family structures and kinship practices across several major African cities. The results are discussed in the context of the interplay between traditional kinship systems and modern urban challenges, emphasizing the impact of migration, economic pressures, and the blending of traditional and modern family values.

Family Composition

Table 1. Distribution of Family Structure by Area (Urban vs. Rural)

| Area | Nuclear Family (%) | Extended Family (%) |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Urban Areas | 68% | 32% |
| Rural Areas | 25% | 75% |

A key finding from the survey is the shift toward more nuclear family structures in urban areas compared to traditional extended family systems. In urban areas, 68% of respondents reported living in nuclear families, while only 32% indicated living in extended family arrangements. This is in stark contrast to rural areas, where 75% of respondents reported living in extended families. The preference for nuclear family structures in urban areas is attributed to factors such as limited living space, economic constraints, and the increasing individualization of social relations. This trend aligns with findings from earlier studies, such as those by Goody (1982), which

suggest that urbanization often leads to a decline in the prominence of extended families in favor of more individualized, nuclear family structures.

Migration and Family Ties

Table 2. Impact of Migration on Kinship Relationships

| Category | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------|
| Respondents who migrated (from rural to urban areas) | 45% |
| Migrants reporting weakened extended family ties | 52% |
| Migrants maintaining strong family ties | 48% |

The survey also highlighted the role of migration in shaping kinship relationships. Of the 1,000 respondents, 45% reported having migrated from rural to urban areas, with migration rates being highest in cities like Lagos and Nairobi. Among migrants, 52% indicated that their migration had led to a weakening of ties with their extended families, as they were geographically distant from relatives and unable to maintain regular contact. However, 48% of migrants reported maintaining strong emotional and financial ties with their families back home, often through remittances and occasional visits. These findings suggest that while migration may disrupt traditional family structures, it does not necessarily sever kinship bonds. Instead, migrants often maintain relationships through alternative means such as financial support, which has been highlighted in studies by Ryan (2011).

Gender Roles within the Family

Table 3. Gender Roles and Family Dynamics in Urban and Rural Areas

| Area | Women as Primary Caregivers (%) | Men Sharing Household Responsibilities (%) |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Urban Areas | 63% | 45% |
| Rural Areas | 78% | – |

In terms of gender roles, the survey found significant shifts in family dynamics in urban settings. Among respondents in urban areas, 63% of women reported being the primary caregivers in their families, while 45% of men reported taking on equal or shared responsibilities in household duties. This contrasts with rural areas, where 78% of women are the primary caregivers and men often play a more dominant role in financial support. The increasing involvement of men in domestic duties in urban areas reflects broader social changes and the influence of globalization, which has led to evolving gender norms (Tacoli & Satterthwaite, 2013). While these shifts suggest progress toward more equitable gender roles, the study also found that traditional gender expectations persist in many urban households, particularly in relation to the division of labor and decision-making within the family.

Perceptions of Kinship

Table 4. Perceived Importance of Kinship in Urban and Rural Contexts

| Area | Respondents Viewing Kinship as Vital (%) | Key Description |
|-------------|--|--|
| Urban Areas | 70% | Kinship continues to provide emotional and financial support despite the decline of traditional extended family systems. |
| Rural Areas | 85% | Kinship remains central to daily life, ensuring economic and social stability through extended family networks. |

When asked about the importance of kinship in their lives, 70% of respondents in urban areas expressed that kinship remains a vital source of emotional and financial support, even though the traditional extended family system is no longer dominant. This finding aligns with the work of Lesthaeghe (2010), who argued that while the family structure may evolve, the core functions of kinship such as social security, emotional support, and the transfer of resources remain integral to African social systems. In contrast, rural respondents were more likely to view kinship as central to their daily lives, with 85% emphasizing the continued importance of extended family networks for economic and social stability.

The qualitative interviews, conducted with 40 participants from the initial survey sample, provide deeper insights into the changing nature of kinship and family in urban Africa. The interviews focused on the themes of kinship ties, gender roles, migration, and the integration of traditional and modern family practices. The findings reveal both continuity and change in family practices across the four cities studied.

Kinship and Family Practices

Participants emphasized that while the form of family structures may be shifting, the importance of kinship remains central. Many respondents, particularly in urban areas, expressed a sense of loss regarding the traditional extended family network but found ways to maintain kinship bonds through modern means, such as regular communication via mobile phones and social media. One respondent from Johannesburg stated,

"Even though I live far from my extended family, we still keep in touch. I send money, and we talk almost every week through WhatsApp. It doesn't feel as distant."

This statement underscores the adaptive nature of kinship in the context of globalization, highlighting how technology has become a fundamental tool in maintaining family connections that would otherwise be strained by geographic separation. The role of technology, particularly through platforms such as WhatsApp, social media, and video calls, allows families to transcend physical boundaries, facilitating real-time communication and emotional support regardless of distance. This shift represents a significant departure from traditional kinship practices, where family relationships were primarily maintained through face-to-face interactions within local communities. In a globalized world, kinship ties are no longer constrained by proximity but are instead sustained by digital platforms that enable ongoing interaction, even if members are scattered across different cities or countries.

However, while technology enables these virtual connections, it also introduces new complexities to the nature of kinship. The virtual nature of these relationships, while providing convenience and accessibility, may lack the depth and intimacy of in-person interactions. Studies have shown that while digital communication helps maintain family ties, it does not fully replicate the emotional richness of physical presence. Additionally, there is the issue of digital divide; access to technology is not universal, and socioeconomic disparities may limit some individuals' ability to participate in these virtual family networks. This disparity could create new forms of inequality within families, as those with access to the necessary technology may be able to maintain stronger connections, while others may feel increasingly isolated. Therefore, while technology helps families adapt and stay connected in the face of migration and urbanization, it also reshapes the very nature of kinship, introducing both new opportunities and challenges for maintaining familial bonds in the modern world.

Gender Dynamics

The interviews also revealed that gender roles within the family have evolved, but traditional expectations persist. While many women in urban areas reported having more agency in household decision-making, they still faced pressure to conform to traditional caregiving roles. One female respondent in Nairobi remarked,

"I have a career, but I still feel the responsibility to care for the children and manage the house. It's like society expects that of me."

This response sheds light on a critical and ongoing issue faced by many women in urban Africa, namely the tension between modern gender expectations and traditional caregiving roles. While modern urban environments often promote gender equality in the workforce, with women increasingly participating in paid employment and public life, traditional norms surrounding caregiving and domestic responsibilities persist, especially in the context of family dynamics. Women in urban Africa are caught in a paradox: they are encouraged to pursue professional careers and gain financial independence, yet are simultaneously expected to fulfill the traditional caregiving role within the family. This dual expectation often leads to a "second shift," where women find themselves balancing the demands of work and domestic responsibilities, often with little institutional or societal support. For example, many urban women continue to bear the brunt of household chores, child-rearing, and care for elderly family members, even while maintaining full-time jobs outside the home. The response also illustrates that these gendered expectations are deeply ingrained in social norms, which can create internal conflict for women who wish to challenge these roles. The persistence of these traditional expectations, despite the rise of more progressive gender norms in urban settings, highlights a broader societal issue: the slow pace of cultural transformation in areas like gender roles, which often lags behind economic and political progress. This tension underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to gender equality, one that recognizes and addresses the complex interplay between modern aspirations and traditional responsibilities. Moreover, it suggests that any efforts to promote gender equality must not only focus on the workforce but also on redistributing caregiving responsibilities and supporting women in balancing their roles at home and in society.

Impact of Migration

Migration was identified as a key factor influencing family dynamics. Respondents who had migrated from rural areas discussed how the separation from extended family led to a reconfiguration of their family roles. Some participants in Accra mentioned that they had become more self-reliant in urban settings, which altered their relationship with extended family members. A male migrant in Lagos noted,

"I am more independent now, but I still support my parents financially, even though they are far away. My siblings are in other cities, so we rely on each other for support."

These interviews suggest that while migration may physically distance family members, it often leads to a redefined sense of kinship that is sustained through economic and emotional support. This shift challenges the traditional understanding of kinship, which has typically been seen as a geographically proximate and biologically rooted network of relationships. In the context of migration, kinship is increasingly characterized by emotional bonds and financial transactions that transcend physical boundaries. However, this redefinition is not without complexities. While the economic support, often in the form of remittances, plays a pivotal role in maintaining familial ties, it can also create a hierarchical relationship between migrants and their families. Migrants may feel a sense of obligation to

financially support their relatives back home, but this support often comes with the expectation that they will continue to fulfill traditional family roles, even from a distance. This dynamic can lead to tensions, as migrants juggle the demands of their immediate nuclear family in the city with the expectations placed on them by their extended family in rural or home regions. Furthermore, while emotional support can be maintained through technology, such as regular phone calls or social media interactions, these virtual connections are sometimes limited in their capacity to replicate the closeness of in-person interactions, which can cause feelings of alienation or guilt. This evolving nature of kinship also raises questions about the sustainability of these long-distance relationships and the emotional toll they may take on both the migrants and their families. Ultimately, the redefinition of kinship through migration is a double-edged sword: while it helps to maintain connections across borders, it also brings forth new forms of dependency, emotional strain, and cultural adaptation.

Hybridization of Family Structures

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews was the hybridization of family structures. In urban areas, some respondents spoke of forming "chosen families" with close friends or neighbors, who replaced or supplemented biological kin in important familial roles. A respondent in Nairobi shared,

"My closest family members are my friends. We have a strong bond, and I consider them as family even though we are not related by blood."

This text mirrors the changing state of kinship in the urban contexts where non-blood kins are playing more and more central roles in the family life especially in the context of migration and urbanization. Kinship in the past was defined only by biological ties like marriage, families, or direct descent and is the basic conference of family structure and social systems. However, the growing population mobility particularly in urban settings has expanded the traditional boundaries of kinship. Since people are moving out of the rural communities to the urban centres in search of better opportunities, the physical distance between the extended families often breaks the support systems that existed in the traditional societies. To counter this displacement, the urban dwellers are turning to non-blood relations like the close friends, neighbours and workmates to play emotional, economic and social roles that were initially the prerogative of the blood members. This shift is not just a practical change; it represents the changes in the wider society in which the relations between people are characterized no longer only by the nature of deterrents but rather by the mutual experience and mutually developed system of support that is inherent to the city life. The plasticity of kinship here intensifies a more inclusive understanding of the family one that does not only focus on the biological ties but also includes emotional relationships and voluntary associations. Moreover, this effect challenges the traditional anthropological visions of kinship, which have been also very limited in scope to biological or marital connections. It is also an indicator of a widespread cultural transformation in urban societies across the globe because the processes of globalization, migration and modern exigencies constantly transform the ways of how families are built and maintained. As a result, the increased recognition of the non bio-blood ties in urban Africa does not only affirm the resilience and flexibility of kinship networks, but also reveals the need to meet the socio-economic and emotional needs of urban people in anthropological study of family and kinship.

Reconfiguring Kinship and Family Practices in Urban African Contexts

The results of this paper indicate that, in the modern urban Africa, the kinship and family-based positions are changing significantly due to the rapid urbanization, increased migration, and globalization. The prevalence of the nuclear family organization in the urban setting represents the results of longer-term demographic

changes taking place in African societies as a whole, which is in line with the theoretical assumptions of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010). However, contrary to the situation in the West, where such a shift is frequently linked with individualism and the breakdown of familial duties, urban Africans seem to be bargaining a mixed direction: adhering to household nuclearity and fulfilling extended kinship connection via remittances, digital communication and intermittent co-presence. This two-sided nature highlights how the cultural importance of familial interdependence remains and puts a point forward showing that modernization in Africa does not necessarily dispel all traditional norms but rather gives rise to hybridised ways of kinship that fit within the limits of urban living.

The findings also emphasize the concept of purposeful kinship where members of a community develop their relationship networks on the basis of emotional and practical attachment and co-residence, as opposed to blood connection. This change echoes the position of Jordan et al. (2023) who contend that African kinship systems have structural malleability and thus allow individuals to reorganize family relations strategically to address economical precarity and disjointed migration patterns. These selected family networks serve as very important sources of support especially in urban settings where the state welfare systems are minimal and thus they act as informal social protection systems that may substitute gaps caused by lack of extended kinship networks. These results make it hard to ethnically separate the old anthropological understanding of biological and affinal kinship, and call a new conceptualisation of family into being not as a lineage system but as a negotiated practice in response to socio-economic demands.

Changes in gender in the family demonstrate both development and continuity of patriarchy. Greater participation of men in the process of caregiving is in line with the global changes in regard to egalitarian gender roles, which implies that masculinity in urban African families redefines itself in a gradual way. Nevertheless, the fact that women are still disproportionately responsible for doing care even after some of them have been engaged in wage labour indicates that structural gender inequalities are still deeply entrenched. Modernisation in the urban areas is not enough to eradicate normative gender scripts and results support the broader African gender literature that economic role change may be a precursor, and even a halt in the relationship between domestic power, even though these changes do not need to occur (Qambela, 2021; Allen & Green-Barteet, 2023). These inconsistencies lead to a very serious policy implication: urban development projects should incorporate gender-responsive policies that recognise the unpaid domestic labour that women bear a greater burden.

The meaning and practice of familial obligation is subject to new complications created by migration-induced distance between kin networks. Although numerous migrants maintain the connection with the extended family by sending remittances and using the Internet, reliance on money streams can alter the hierarchical structure and expectations of families, which can result in one-way or asymmetrical forms of reciprocity. Migrants are not only economic providers but also have a symbolic meaning of family success thus putting strain and pressure. This is similar to the claims by Lim & Datta (2024) that kinship has always been an economic institution, however, its economic rationality is even more evident in the circumstances of migration, when financial remittances replace physical co-presence. The increased monetisation of intergenerational expectations is lessening the kinship based on shared dwelling and is to a greater degree necessitating obligatory economic exchange, which calls into question the sustainability and emotive implications of such structure.

Anthropology of family life is a new trend in the technological mediation of kinship, mediated by use of mobile phones, messaging platform, as well as social media. The ability to preserve emotional intimacy in spite of geographical distance defeats the conventional theories on kinship, which identify the strength of relations with physical distance. At the same time, the digital connection can lead to the affective fragmentation when the frequency of communication grows and, at the same time, the relational depth decreases. Such dynamics demonstrate the emergence of inequalities in the kinship networks since there are people who cannot access the digital technologies and they face social exclusion even in their families. Therefore, the issue of digital stratification should be approached with all necessary seriousness in future studies on kinship, as it informs belonging and non-belonging in social situations in cities.

There is one more socio-spatial aspect that is behind reconfiguration of the kinship practices. The living conditions in urban areas, especially lack of housing, labour unrests, and expensive living standards are obstacles to the traditional African demands of living together in a multigenerational household. The nuclear family therefore comes out not only as a cultural choice but as a survival mode. Even though long-standing family demands still remain symbolically and economically important, co-residence, which is the backbone of the kinship, has been becoming less and less sustainable (Naab & Laube, 2025). Such a discrepancy between the obligation and physicality points to the fact that the concept of kinship in urban Africa is not tied down to a home or a compound, but is spread out in networks of movement, trans local relationships and periodic connections. As policy, these structural limitations highlight the importance of urban housing and labour systems that are based on real household realities as opposed to idealized traditional lines.

Together, these results show that urban African kinship does not deteriorate or does not simply Westernize, but redefines its main principles in new types of flexibility, selectivity, and role redistribution. Belonging, identity and moral obligation are all still anchored in the family, but through new formations of the city, which are developed through the strategies of survival in urban areas. These trends provide a theoretical contribution to the study of kinship because they refute dichotomies of traditional and modern family systems. Instead, African urban kinship is to be thought of as the spectrum of adaptations that are still part of larger social changes, yet the cultural collective responsibility remains.

The study should ask the question of the long-term implications of these changes in the future. With the increased centrality of non-biological kin networks, what will be renegotiated are inheritance, custodial rights and intergenerational support? What will the long-term effects of men becoming more involved in domesticity be? Is the solidarity perpetuated or aggravated by remittance-based kinship using socio-economic needs? These questions should be addressed in order to develop social and urban policies that support the diversity of modern African families. It is only through imagining kinship as a living and changing institution that researchers and policymakers can appropriately address the realities of urban African life and protect the long-lasting status of the family as a site of nurturance, collaboration and support.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the evolving nature of kinship and family structures in urban Africa, with a focus on the impact of urbanization, migration, and globalization. The findings indicate that while traditional extended family systems are becoming less prominent in urban settings, new forms of kinship are emerging, particularly through the recognition of non-biological kin. These changes are primarily driven by migration and the pressures of urban living, which challenge

traditional family structures but also foster more flexible and adaptable family networks. Migration, in particular, plays a significant role in reshaping kinship practices, as individuals maintain familial bonds through remittances, technology, and emotional support, despite geographic distance.

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge on kinship in urban Africa, offering insights into how family structures are adapting to modern socio-economic realities. By recognizing the importance of non-biological kin and hybrid family forms, this study challenges traditional anthropological notions of kinship, which have often been limited to biological relationships. The implications of these findings call for more inclusive social policies that support diverse family arrangements and address the evolving dynamics of kinship in urban African contexts. Further research is needed to explore the long-term socio-economic impacts of these changes, especially in relation to gender, migration, and the role of non-biological kin in sustaining family networks.

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