

African transnational families: cross-country and gendered comparisons

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Introduction

- **Transnational family** = family in which children live in country origin and one or both parents live in another country
- Most studies focussed on either the well-being of children 'left behind' or the well-being of migrant mothers. Not on fathers.
- Few studies compared transnational family life of mother- and father-away families => little knowledge about disparities between migrant mothers and fathers in transnational families.
- Some quantitative studies find that children have more difficulties when mothers migrate than when fathers migrate. Yet, these studies focussed on children and have limited information on the parents' characteristics
- This study investigates the characteristics of transnational mother- and father-away families with the aim to understand what differences may exist between transnational family structures and trajectories of migrant mothers and fathers

Data & Methods

Data

Transnational Child-Raising Arrangements between Africa and Europe Survey (TCRAF-Eu) & Migrations between Africa and Europe Survey (MAFE)

Respondents

- **Non-transnational parents:** Fathers (N=686) and mothers (N=696) living with their children in European destination countries (Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, & the UK)
- **Transnational parents:** Fathers (N=740) and mothers (N=699) who are living in Europe and of whom at least one child lives at the origin country (Angola, DRC, Ghana, Nigeria & Senegal)

Analytical Approach

Step 1: Comparing transnational and non-transnational fathers and mothers with descriptive statistics (Pearson's chi²) on several socio-economic & demographic characteristics

Step 2: Sequence analysis to study differences in family formation trajectories transnational mothers and fathers. We focus on the family formation years of parents between 18-35 years of age.

Results Step 1

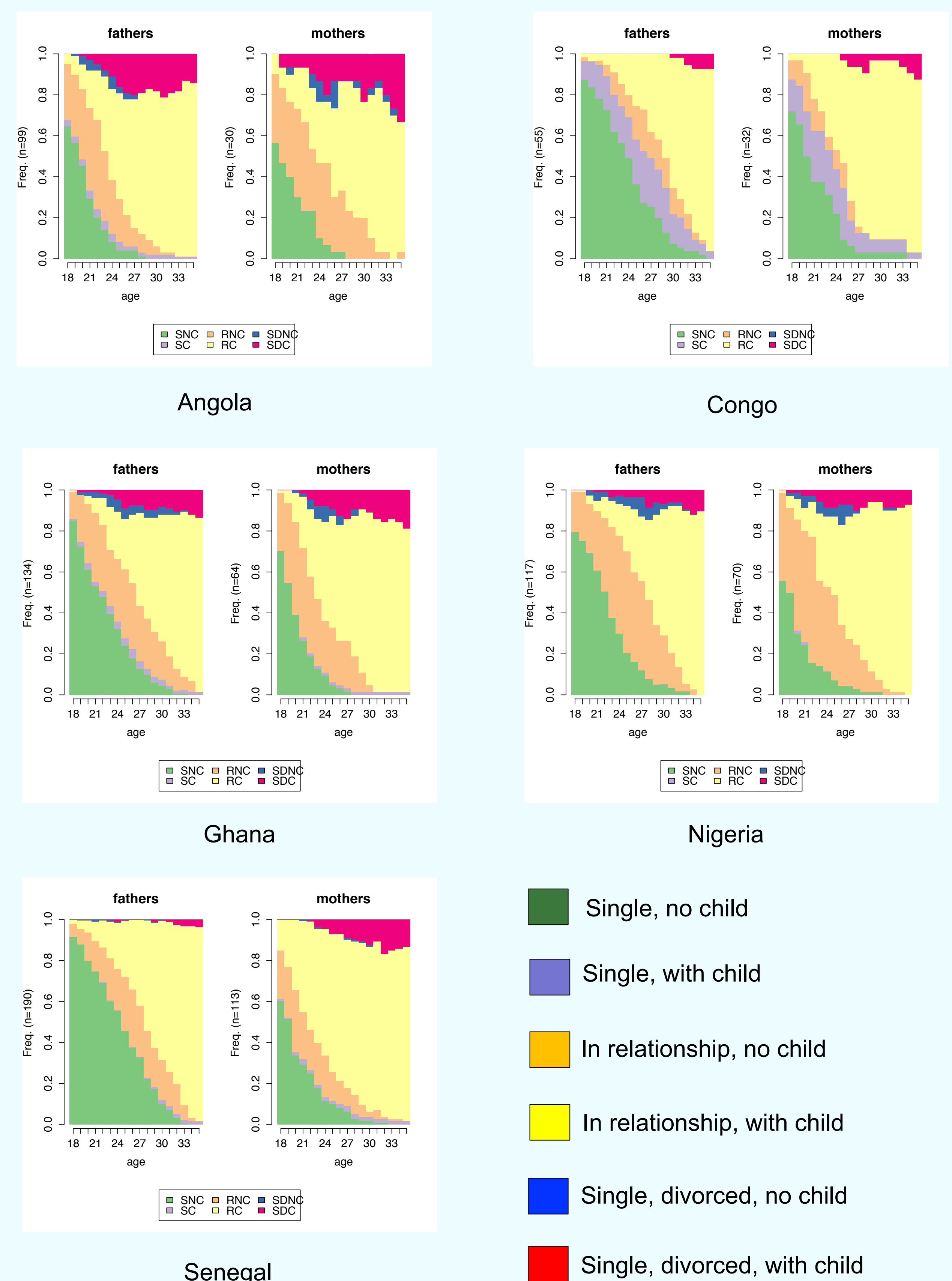
Significant differences across transnational and non-transnational parents and across the sexes

- Men migrate more often alone than women, leaving their wife and children in the country of origin
- Women more often join their husbands when they migrate
- When women migrate alone they are more often in a transnational family arrangement and single mothers
- The mother takes up the care of the children when the father migrates, while female kin members provide care when the father migrates (with exception of DRC)
- Transnational parents more often have children from multiple relationships (with exception of Senegal for transnational fathers)
- While transnational fathers are more likely to have children from multiple relations in most flows, transnational mothers are also very likely to have children from multiple relations

Results Step 2

Results of sequence analysis in which family life trajectories of transnational mothers and fathers are compared.

The differences between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers are statistically significant in all 5 origin countries



Conclusion

Important differences between non-transnational and transnational mothers and fathers:

1. Transnational families structurally differ from non-transnational families on important socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics: single parenthood, children from multiple relationships, and lower education.
 - This corresponds closely to what family sociologists find make 'fragile families' amongst non-migrant families
2. These findings pertain particular to transnational mothers, who more frequently face single parenthood and are more often divorced than transnational migrant fathers
 - Hence, policies aiming to improve family life of migrants need to consider the disadvantages that particularly migrant women experience in maintaining their family life.
3. Important to take migrants' origin context into account: Family and gender norms country of origin and the political context not only shape the composition of the migrant flow, but they seem also related to transnational family life and family formation trajectories.

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Project websites:

• www.tcra.nl

• http://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/