

African transnational families: Cross-country and gendered comparisons

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Abstract

Studies indicated differences between transnational family life for migrant mothers and fathers and that the effects on their “left-behind” children differ according to who migrates. Yet little is known about why these differences exist. This paper aims to fill this gap by comparing transnational and nontransnational African families with parents living in Europe to understand their different family structures. We analyse three datasets with information on migrants from five African origin countries in eight European countries. Our analyses reveal important differences between transnational and nontransnational families and between transnational mothers and fathers. Transnational mothers are more often single, have children from multiple relationships, and start family life earlier than transnational fathers and nontransnational parents. This corresponds closely to what family sociologists have found make “fragile families” among nonmigrants. Our work thus indicates that policies aiming to improve migrants' lives need to consider the disadvantages that particularly migrant women experience in maintaining their family life.

KEYWORDS

cross-country comparison, family trajectories, gendered migration, migrant parents, sub-Saharan Africa, transnational families

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transnational families, in which children live in a country of origin and one or both parents migrate to another country, are common (UNICEF, 2006). Especially in migration from the Global South to North, where strict migration policies limit the possibilities to migrate as a family, transnational families are a frequent phenomenon. Since the end of the 1990s, scholars have investigated this type of family, resulting in a burgeoning literature on various aspects of transnational family life. These studies find that mothers and their children who

“stay behind” suffer emotionally and physically when mothers migrate and are forced by circumstance to live for long periods of time away from their children (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2009; Boccagni, 2012; Dreby, 2006; Parreñas, 2001, 2005). Gender norms are invoked in explaining such findings. Mothers are often seen by children and society at large as the primary caregivers, and the care of children is expected to entail copresent mothering (Dreby, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2005). Thus, migrant mothers, unable to meet these standards, feel guilt and stress, and children, not living with copresent mothers, feel that they have something missing in their lives. Conversely, norms on fathering relate to the financial provisioning for a family, something that can even be enhanced by migration. Thus, their migration is seen and experienced less as a departure from gender norms and puts men and children under less stress. Yet a close

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investigation of these studies reveals that most of the data come from transnational migrant mothers. Only recently have studies focussed on fathers (Poeze & Mazzucato, 2012; Pribilsky, 2004; Waters, 2009), indicating that fathers also suffer from the separation from their children, albeit in different ways. Finally, these studies are small-scale and thus focus on transnational parents only (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). They therefore cannot compare their findings with nontransnational parents, in order to identify what may be particular to being in a transnational family versus more general characteristics of a population.

Although gender norms are important to consider, other factors also need to be explored. There are indications from gender and migration studies that women face different contexts abroad, leading to different outcomes, and that they live in different family structures. For example, a large-scale study investigating how gender, social class, and origin affect migrant health in Spain found that that migrant women of all social classes experienced worse employment conditions, greater material/financial deprivation, and lower health status than migrant men (Malmusi, Borrell, & Benach, 2010). Furthermore, it has been found that African female migrants have different social network characteristics leading to different propensities to migrate and in different ways (Toma & Vause, 2014), Filipino women sometimes migrate to escape problematic marriages (Constable, 2003), and when Ghanaian women migrate on their own, this is associated with higher rates of divorce than when men migrate or when the couple migrates together (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015). None of these studies focus specifically on transnational families, yet they provide important clues that more may be at hand than gender norms and expectations, which have been the predominant explanation for differences between transnational migrant mothers and fathers.

More recently, large-scale transnational family studies emerged that compare transnational mother- and father-away families and the effects that these have on those involved (DeWaard, Nobles & Donato, 2018; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Haagsman, 2015; Liu, Li, & Ge, 2009; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Wen & Lin, 2012). For the most part, these studies are conducted in the origin countries and focus on the effects of maternal or paternal migration on children. Some of these studies indeed confirm that children have more difficulties when mothers migrate than when fathers migrate (DeWaard et al., 2018; Dreby & Adkins, 2010; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Liu et al., 2009; Wen & Lin, 2012). Yet studies in African countries do not show uniform results on this matter. In fact, in Ghana and Nigeria, children in mother-away families did not show any difference in psychological well-being than children living with both parents at origin (Mazzucato et al., 2015). Furthermore, as these studies contain only limited information on the parents, there is little knowledge about the disparities between migrant fathers and mothers in transnational families that could potentially cause these different outcomes.

Finally, few studies on transnational families have been comparative in nature. As most studies on transnational families are in-depth ethnographic studies, they have focussed on one particular origin group in one particular host country. Consequently, there is almost no comparative cross-country research on the structure of transnational families (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). Doing a cross-country comparison allows us to address this gap by investigating whether

characteristics of transnational parents are similar for different origin countries and whether we find common patterns in their family trajectories. Until recently large datasets that allow the study of characteristics and family trajectories of transnational parents were unavailable.

This paper identifies differences between transnational and nontransnational parents, as well as between transnational mothers and fathers, hereby providing important information to help explain and contextualise differences found in the literature on the effects of maternal and paternal migration on children in the country of origin and on the migrant parents' own well-being. It does so by analysing recent and unique datasets that contain data specific to transnational family life of five sub-Saharan African countries of origin (Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo [DR Congo], Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria) and eight Western European destination countries (Netherlands, Belgium, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland). The datasets that are used include information on members of both (male and female) transnational (at least one child in the country of origin) and nontransnational migrant families (living with all the children in the host country) and also include retrospective information suitable for studying family trajectories.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on gender and migration has shown that women and men have different social network characteristics leading to different propensities to migrate, may have different reasons for migrating, and face different conditions overseas (Constable, 2003; Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Eremenko & González-Ferrer, 2018; Liu, Riosmena, & Creighton, 2018; Malmusi et al., 2010; Toma & Vause, 2014). Yet there has been no systematic comparison of transnational families and in particular of migrant mothers and fathers (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). This literature review summarises findings from different studies investigating the characteristics of female and male migrants and studies on transnational families that took the sex of the migrant parent into account, to inform our analyses.

2.1 | Paternal and maternal migration

Although most migration scholarship has historically focused on men, as early as the 1960s, women made up almost half of the share of international migrants and the number of female migrants has been rising since (Dreby & Adkins, 2010). In the 1990s, feminist scholars noted that more women were migrating independently in search of work and that an important share of these women were mothers. One of the main drivers for these changes has been the global division of labour leading to a demand for cheap female labour (domestic and care work) from the Global South in the North (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Parreñas, 2000, 2001). Central to these qualitative studies, conducted for the most part in Latin America and South-East Asia, was the hardship and emotional difficulties these mothers faced because they did not conform to the norm of biological motherhood and copresent parenting (Madianou & Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2000). Moreover, these studies saw mother-child separation as detrimental to the child's well-being in the origin country and for their migrant mothers

(Bernhard et al., 2009; Boccagni, 2012; Dreby, 2006; Parreñas, 2001, 2005; Suarez-Orozco, Todorova, & Louie, 2002).

Unlike maternal migration, scholars did not see paternal migration as an abrupt break in family life, and therefore, effects for children and fathers were seen as minimal. Hence, transnational families in which fathers migrated received little attention (Haagsman & Mazzucato, 2014; Jordan, Dito, Nobles & Graham, 2018; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2012; Pribilsky, 2004; Waters, 2009). Yet, although mothers are increasingly forming transnational families by independently migrating, it seems that it is still more common for fathers to do so, although exact figures are unknown (Dreby & Adkins, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2002). It is therefore surprising that there is still limited research on the effects of paternal migration. Even more so because recent scholarship has shown that, in African and Latin American contexts, transnational fathers are engaged in the upbringing of their children, especially when they are still married to the biological mother, and that separation from their children also has negative effects on the emotional well-being of migrant fathers (Carling & Tønnessen, 2013; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2012; Pribilsky, 2004; Waters, 2009).

These studies have been fundamental for highlighting the issue of transnational parenting and the emotional toll that it can bring to parents. Yet, because of their small-scale, they only focus on transnational parents and cannot assess to what degree their findings are attributable to the transnational nature of parenting or to characteristics in a wider population (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). Furthermore, they have not explicitly compared transnational mothers with transnational fathers. A recent body of literature has engaged large-scale data collection to conduct such comparisons and test the effects of parental migration on the children who stay at origin (DeWaard et al., 2018; Dreby, 2006; Graham & Jordan, 2011; Haagsman, 2015; Liu et al., 2009; Mazzucato et al., 2015; Parreñas, 2005; Wen & Lin, 2012; Wu & Cebotari, 2018). In line with ethnographic studies, some of these studies find that children in South East Asia and China have more difficulties when mothers migrate (Jordan & Graham, 2012; Liu et al., 2009; Wen & Lin, 2012).

Recent work also points to the importance of the caregiver in transnational families (Mazzucato et al., 2015; Peng & Wong, 2015). Caregivers are central to the functioning of transnational families as they mediate between the child and the migrant parent. Having a stable caregiving arrangement where children stay with the same caregiver throughout the parent's migration period was an important factor for children's psychological well-being (Mazzucato et al., 2015). Although fathers mostly leave the children in the care of the biological mother, migrant mothers often opt for a female kin member such as their mother or sister (Åkesson, Carling, & Drotbohm, 2012; Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Haagsman, 2015; Parreñas, 2005).

In sum, the literature has mainly studied the effects of the migration of mothers in transnational families, and the few studies that compared migrant mothers and fathers found that children were affected more when mothers migrated. However, the latter studies surveyed children in the country of origin and not their parents and could therefore not include many parental features as control variables. Consequently, the disparities between the characteristics of migrant fathers and mothers in transnational families remain a gap in the literature, and these are important to explain differences between mother- and father-away

families. Moreover, the above literature review drew from cases around the world, but comparative research is limited. In this study, we compare migrants from different origin countries in order to investigate whether findings apply cross-nationally. The next section will draw on literature outside of transnational family studies to sketch the main differences found between the family trajectories of migrant men and women that may inform our investigation of transnational families.

2.2 | Differences in family trajectories of migrant men and women

Few studies have explicitly compared male and female migrants and their family behaviours (Kraus, 2017). Yet studies on migration and gender have shown how men and women have different motivations to migrate (Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Kanaiaupuni, 1999; Massey, Fischer, & Capoferro, 2006), migration experiences (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Wong, 2006), opportunities in destination country contexts (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Feliciano, 2008), social network characteristics (Curran & Rivero-Fuentes, 2003; Liu et al., 2018; Malmusi et al., 2010; Toma & Vause, 2014), and transnational practices (Goldring, 2001; Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005). Goldring (2001) found that Mexican men in the United States were more involved in citizenship practices oriented towards their country of origin. Kanaiaupuni (2000) found that education for Mexican women increases their propensity to migrate to the United States, resulting in Mexican migrant women in the United States being more highly educated than men (Feliciano, 2008). Effects of migration have also been found to differ for men and women. For example, migration generally benefits the career of the husband, whereas the wives' employment status is negatively affected irrespective of employment and income before migration (Boyle, Kulu, Cooke, Gayle, & Mulder, 2008).

Migrants can experience conflicting gender norms in the destination and origin country and within the migrant community. These gender roles can affect men and women differently (Gallo, 2006; Hill, 2004; Jolly & Reeves, 2005) and ultimately affect couples' relationships (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015; Fournon & Schiller, 2001; Mahler & Pessar, 2001). Hirsch (2003) found that some Mexican migrant women enjoyed greater freedom in the United States than in Mexico and, as a result, experienced more marriage instability. Migrant women experience a change in gender roles by taking up employment, sometimes becoming the main breadwinner. Their husbands do not always appreciate these new roles and can feel threatened in their masculinity, which can lead to stressed marital relationships (Charsley, 2005; Gallo, 2006; George, 2000; Manuh, 1999; Zontini, 2010). Caarls and Mazzucato (2015) found that in Ghanaian couples where the wife migrated independently, the risk of divorce was higher than the other way around.

Although these studies do not specifically focus on migrants in transnational family arrangements, they give indications that migration affects women and men differently. It is therefore important to investigate this for transnational families in particular, as it can give us important clues to explain the differences in effects of transnational family arrangements on men and women and on their children who stay at origin.

3 | BACKGROUND

By 2013, approximately 737,217 Ghanaians, 1,117,901 Nigerians, 518,711 Angolans, 1,306,026 Congolese, and 540,363 Senegalese had migrated to search for better opportunities abroad (World Bank, 2016). Although these figures do not include undocumented migrants, they indicate that the phenomenon of migration from our study countries is large. The patterns of movement and the composition of these migration flows differ between the five African origin countries. The economic, political, and environmental situation in many sub-Saharan countries led to more migrants entering European countries, resulting in a significant African presence in Europe. Although initial flows tended to follow colonial ties, throughout the latter half of the 20th century, African migration diversified to more destinations (Grillo & Mazzucato, 2008).

Two countries in our study, the DR Congo and Angola, are postconflict countries, although the eastern regions of the DR Congo still experience regular violence. As a consequence of these wars, large migration and refugee flows emerged, leaving families scattered both within and outside the country (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Grassi & Vivet, 2014). Nigerian and Ghanaian migration was more specifically caused by the economic crises during the 1980s in both countries, when many migrants left for Europe, sparking chain migration and family reunification later on (Adepoju, 2004; Mazzucato, 2008; Schans, Mazzucato, Schoumaker, & Flahaux, 2013). Senegalese migration took place initially mainly to France in the 1960s in response to the so-called guest worker schemes (Pison, Hill, Cohen, & Foote, 1997). During the 1980s, Senegal also experienced economic difficulties, substantially increasing migration from Senegal to Europe, and also diversifying European destinations (Sakho, Beauchemin, Schoumaker, & Flahaux, 2013).

The share of female migrants varies greatly by regional and national origin. In particular, the feminization of migration has been much more pronounced in migration flows from Ghana, Nigeria, and DR Congo compared with Senegal and Angola, with women from these former three countries migrating increasingly independently instead of joining or following their husbands' migration (Adepoju, 2004; González-Ferrer et al., 2014; Schoumaker et al., 2015).

These differences in the composition of migration flows can be partly explained by the organisation of family life. Family life in many African countries shares certain characteristics, such as the importance of the extended family, strong division between gender responsibilities, multilocal residence of spouses and children (not living in the same house), and loyalty towards own lineage members over conjugal bonds (Locoh, 1989; Beauchemin, Caarls, & Mazzucato, 2015). Although exact numbers on child fostering are rare, African Demographic and Health Surveys showed that 9% to 35% of the households foster children that do not live with either parent (Pilon & Vignikin, 2006). There are also differences between these origin countries. In particular, different gender norms and relations shape women's freedom of movement, with countries where gender hierarchy is stricter and women engage in less independent migration (e.g., Senegal), compared with countries where women have independent household budgets or come from matrilineal kinship systems, both of which give women more freedom of movement (e.g., DR Congo, Ghana, and Nigeria; Adepoju, 2004; Beauchemin, Caarls, & Mazzucato, 2015; Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015; Schoumaker et al., 2015).

Although polygamy is practiced in all five countries, the prevalence and social acceptance differs: Polygamous marriages are less common in Ghana and DR Congo compared with Nigeria and Angola, and it is most widespread in Senegal (Caarls, Mazzucato, Schans, Quartey, & Tagoe, 2015; Findley, 1997; NDHS, 2008; Nzatzola, 2006). Even though divorce is prevalent in all five countries, it is most frequent in Ghana and DR Congo (33.2% and 28.8% of first marriages ended in divorce, respectively) and less frequent in Nigeria and Senegal (11.8% and 19.7% of first marriages ended in divorce, respectively; Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015). In Table 1, we summarise the main differences and similarities between these five origin countries.

As a consequence of different origin contexts, migration patterns, family organisation, and gender roles in countries of origin, family arrangements occurring after migration might also differ—both between origin countries and between men and women. When exploring the different forms, characteristics, and trajectories of transnational families, these differences can help to contextualise our findings on migrant mothers and fathers.

TABLE 1 Differences and similarities between the five origin countries

| | DRC | Angola | Ghana | Nigeria | Senegal |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| European migration patterns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to Belgium Both male/female migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to Portugal Almost equal male/female migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to the United Kingdom Both male/female migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to the United Kingdom Both male/female migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly to France Primarily male migration |
| Family norms | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More focus on nuclear family Scattered families due to conflict Frequent divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matrilineal groups Scattered families due to conflict Patchwork families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matrilineal groups Frequent divorce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modest divorce More focus on nuclear family | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women live with husband's family Modest divorce |
| Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less polygamy^a Independent women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some polygamy Independent women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less polygamy Independent women | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some polygamy Strictly hierarchical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High polygamy Strictly hierarchical |

Note. DRC = Democratic Republic of Congo.

^aFigures on polygamy in these countries are derived from Demographic and Health Surveys and range from 19% Ghana (less polygamy) to 33% in Nigeria (some polygamy), and 42% in Senegal (high polygamy; Smith-Greenaway & Trinitapoli, 2014).

4 | DATA AND METHODS

4.1 | Datasets

This paper uses three datasets that allow studying the characteristics and family trajectories of transnational parents: the Transnational Child-Raising Arrangements between Africa and Europe (TCRAF-Eu), the Transnational Child-Raising Arrangements between Ghana and the Netherlands (TCRA),¹ and the Migrations between Africa and Europe (MAFE)² surveys. These surveys were conducted among adult migrants from five African origin countries residing in eight European destination countries, where they were interviewed. They include longitudinal, retrospective life-history information on different life domains: housing, education, migration, and family formation and composition. As one of the authors was involved in both projects from their inception, the surveys include identical questions on these domains and thus could effectively be combined for the analyses here presented.

The TCRA and TCRAF-Eu projects interviewed migrants from Angola, Nigeria, and Ghana in three major European destination countries, Portugal, Ireland, and The Netherlands, between November 2010 and October 2011. The MAFE project interviewed migrants from DR Congo, Ghana, and Senegal in their major European destinations of Belgium, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, France, Italy, and Spain between early 2008 and early 2011. In each European country, two to three major cities were selected with high percentages of migrants living there, except in Spain where the whole country was sampled. The samples ranged between 200 and 600 per European country. Due to the absence of a suitable sampling frame and the intention to reach also undocumented migrants, a quota sampling

strategy was used in both projects. Migrants were recruited through multiple gateways to ensure as much variability as possible. These gateways include churches and mosques, markets and shops, community organisations, and contacts of interviewers. Only in Spain a nominal random sample could be drawn from the *Padrón* (Municipal Population Register), in which also undocumented migrants are registered.

In both projects, respondents had to have been born in the respective origin country, have spent at least one continuous year in the respective destination country, and should have migrated at age 18 or older. However, for Angolans in the Netherlands in the TCRAF-Eu sample, this age limit was lowered to 16 years or older given that they often came as Unaccompanied Minors (Wijk van, 2007). For MAFE, respondents had to be aged 25–75, whereas the TCRA and TCRAF-Eu studies did not have age specifications, but respondents had to be parents and have at least one child under the age of 21. This age threshold was chosen because parents are expected to remain involved in parenting at least until this age and it corresponds to the maximum age of children interviewed in secondary school surveys conducted as part of the project. When both parents were living in the host country, one parent was randomly selected to be interviewed. In both projects, an equal number of men and women were sampled. Table 2 shows the characteristics of the sample.

4.2 | Methods and analytical samples

We analyse two types of family arrangements: transnational families (meaning that at least one child lives at origin); and nontransnational families (in which all children live at destination with the mother or

TABLE 2 Analytical samples of the MAFE and TCRA data

| Origin countries | | Fathers | | Mothers | | Total | |
|------------------|--|---------|------|---------|------|-------|-------|
| | | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Angola | Total sample | 324 | 53.5 | 282 | 46.5 | 606 | 100.0 |
| | Nontransnational | 115 | 35.4 | 210 | 64.6 | 325 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational | 209 | 74.4 | 72 | 25.6 | 281 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational (reduced sample ^a) | 99 | 76.7 | 30 | 23.3 | 129 | 100.0 |
| DR Congo | Total sample | 157 | 51.5 | 148 | 48.5 | 305 | 100.0 |
| | Nontransnational | 85 | 45.2 | 103 | 54.8 | 188 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational | 72 | 61.5 | 45 | 38.5 | 117 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational (reduced sample ^a) | 55 | 63.2 | 32 | 36.8 | 87 | 100.0 |
| Ghana | Total sample | 327 | 58.7 | 230 | 41.3 | 557 | 100.0 |
| | Nontransnational | 151 | 54.9 | 124 | 45.1 | 275 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational | 176 | 62.4 | 106 | 37.6 | 282 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational (reduced sample ^a) | 134 | 67.7 | 64 | 32.3 | 198 | 100.0 |
| Nigeria | Total sample | 336 | 55.4 | 270 | 44.6 | 606 | 100.0 |
| | Nontransnational | 155 | 52.6 | 172 | 47.4 | 327 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational | 164 | 58.8 | 115 | 41.2 | 279 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational (reduced sample ^a) | 117 | 37.4 | 70 | 62.6 | 187 | 100.0 |
| Senegal | Total sample | 373 | 49.9 | 374 | 50.1 | 747 | 100.0 |
| | Nontransnational | 68 | 25.5 | 199 | 74.5 | 267 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational | 305 | 63.5 | 175 | 36.5 | 480 | 100.0 |
| | Transnational (reduced sample ^a) | 190 | 62.7 | 113 | 37.3 | 303 | 100.0 |

Note. "Nontransnational": respondent lives with all children at destination; "Transnational": at least one child of respondent lives in country of origin. MAFE = Migrations between Africa and Europe; TCRA = Transnational Child-Raising Arrangements between Ghana and the Netherlands; TCRAF-Eu = Transnational Child-Raising Arrangements between Africa and Europe.

Source: TCRA (2011), TCRAF-Eu (2011), MAFE (2009, 2011).

^a"Reduced sample" refers to the reduced sample sizes that were used to perform sequence analysis in the second part of the analyses (for a more detailed description, see Section 4.4).

father who was interviewed). These categories do not distinguish if parents migrated independently, jointly, or in step-wise fashion. The statistical analysis consists of two parts, each one using a different analytical sample and methodological approach. In the first part, we present descriptive statistics on socio-economic, demographic, and migration-related characteristics of transnational and nontransnational parents. Moreover, we compare transnational and nontransnational parents on grounds of different family and migration-related indicators using statistical significance tests. In the second part, we apply sequence analysis to examine the differences in family formation trajectories from age 18 to 35 of transnational mothers and fathers only. In this second part, we use a reduced sample of transnational parents, as will be explained in more detail below. Our analyses are descriptive with the aim of understanding associations given the lack of knowledge on the basic characteristics of transnational families to date. We do not intend to test causal relationships. Next, each of the two parts of the analysis will be explained.

4.3 | Part 1: Comparing transnational and nontransnational parents

In the first part of the analysis, we explore characteristics of transnational mothers and fathers and use nontransnational parents, that is, those who live with all their children at destination, as a comparison group. As the MAFE survey also captured childless persons, individuals who did not have any child under age 21 at time of the survey were dropped from the analytical sample (DR Congo $N = 84$; Ghana $N = 397$; Senegal $N = 227$).

In both datasets, the remaining fathers and mothers were either living together with their children in one of the European destination countries (808 mothers and 574 fathers), or they were living in a transnational family arrangement, where at least one child was living at origin (513 mothers and 926 fathers). In Table 2, we display the sample sizes per origin country used for the analyses. Note that although both surveys sampled an equal number of both sexes, a different number of men and women was dropped in the MAFE sample, as they were not parents at the time of the survey. In our analytical samples, there are more transnational fathers than mothers, which is in line with recent studies (DeWaard et al., 2018). Because we are especially interested in differences across countries of origin, and also to increase the sample size per origin group, the destination countries for each African group were clustered together. Furthermore, because both surveys included Ghana as one of their origin countries, the data for this African group were pooled.³

First, we compare descriptive statistics of transnational and nontransnational fathers and mothers by comparing their socio-economic and demographic characteristics. The following variables (and categories) are compared:

Age (under 30 years, 30 to 44 years, 45 years or older)

Educational level (at least some primary, at least some secondary, at least some tertiary): Migrants tend to be selected in terms of their educational attainment (González-Ferrer et al., 2014), and the type and strength of selectivity may be different for men and women (Feliciano, 2008).

Marital status (single, union, married, divorced/separated, widowed): The prevalence of divorce varies across origin countries (Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015) and by sex of the migrant (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015). Furthermore, marital instability is also associated with migration, especially if the wife migrates (Charsley, 2005; Gallo, 2006; George, 2000; Manuh, 1999; Zontini, 2010).

Activity (working, unemployed, other): Labour market opportunities and economic integration depend on the destination country context and have been found to be different for men and women (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Feliciano, 2008).

Duration of residence at destination (1 to 2 years, 3 to 5 years, 5 years or more): Child-parent separations and reunification with children at destination depend on the parental length of stay at destination (Eremenko & González-Ferrer, 2018; González-Ferrer, Baizán, & Beauchemin, 2012).

Number of children (1 to 2, 3 to 4, 5 or more): Transnational family arrangements should vary according to the number of children a parent has.

Furthermore, several variables that describe how transnational family life is arranged across borders are included:

Residence of current partner (origin, destination, elsewhere)

Children are from current union (none, some, all)

Children born in past unions live with other parent (none, some, all)

Children's country of birth (all origin, all destination, all other, mixed)

Second, we chose an exploratory approach to discover new insights into transnational family life. In doing so, we defined a variety of indicators we expected to differ across transnational and nontransnational parents and by sex. These indicators include relationship status, socio-economic and legal status, duration of residence, size of social networks, employment status, level of education, country of residence of the current partner and of the parents of the children, type and place of union formation, age and number of children, time of birth of children in relation to migration, whether children are from the current union, whether the respondent has children born outside a union, and whether there has been reunification with children. We performed cross tabulations per flow and tested whether there are significant differences (Pearson's χ^2) between transnational and nontransnational fathers, transnational and nontransnational mothers, and between transnational mothers and fathers. We focus primarily on those indicators that had statistically significant differences for at least one flow, given our interest in understanding the different experiences found in small-scale transnational family studies between mothers and fathers. Furthermore, insignificant results may be the result of our small sample sizes rather than an indication for actual similarities between groups.

4.4 | Part 2: Sequence analysis of transnational fathers and mothers

In the second part of the analysis, we focus only on transnational parents and conduct a sequence analysis to study differences in family

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics on transnational and nontransnational fathers and mothers by origin country

| | | Angola | | DR Congo | | Ghana | | Nigeria | | Senegal | |
|---|--------------------|---------|---------|----------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | | Fathers | Mothers | Fathers | Mothers | Fathers | Mothers | Fathers | Mothers | Fathers | Mothers |
| Transnational parents | N | 209 | 72 | 72 | 45 | 176 | 106 | 164 | 115 | 305 | 175 |
| | % | 74.4 | 25.6 | 61.5 | 38.5 | 62.4 | 37.6 | 58.8 | 41.2 | 63.5 | 36.5 |
| Age | Under 30 years | 10.1 | 5.6 | 5.6 | 6.7 | 1.1 | 8.5 | 1.8 | 2.6 | 4.6 | 10.3 |
| | 30 to 44 years | 85.7 | 90.3 | 50.0 | 42.2 | 59.7 | 59.4 | 75.6 | 86.1 | 58.7 | 65.1 |
| | 45 years or more | 4.3 | 4.2 | 44.4 | 51.1 | 39.2 | 32.1 | 22.6 | 11.3 | 36.7 | 24.6 |
| Level of education | Primary | 3.3 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 4.4 | 4.1 | 5.8 | 1.8 | 5.2 | 54.1 | 57.2 |
| | Secondary | 50.7 | 34.7 | 26.4 | 40.0 | 34.1 | 43.7 | 22.6 | 30.4 | 37.4 | 36.4 |
| | Tertiary | 45.9 | 62.5 | 70.8 | 55.6 | 61.8 | 50.5 | 75.6 | 64.35 | 8.5 | 6.4 |
| Marital status | Single | 13.9 | 38.9 | 2.8 | 0.0 | 7.4 | 17.0 | 10.4 | 9.6 | 2.3 | 0.0 |
| | Union | 59.8 | 29.2 | 12.5 | 20.0 | 12.5 | 10.4 | 13.4 | 13.9 | 3.9 | 1.7 |
| | Married | 25.8 | 30.6 | 66.7 | 60.0 | 73.9 | 54.7 | 76.2 | 74.8 | 86.6 | 82.1 |
| | Divorced/Separated | 0.5 | 1.4 | 13.9 | 17.8 | 5.1 | 17.0 | 0.0 | 1.7 | 6.2 | 10.4 |
| | Widowed | 0.0 | 0.0 | 4.2 | 2.2 | 1.1 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 5.8 |
| Duration of residence | 1–2 years | 2.9 | 11.1 | 25.0 | 26.7 | 18.5 | 27.2 | 18.6 | 11.7 | 11.5 | 22.3 |
| | 3–5 years | 4.8 | 9.7 | 16.7 | 13.3 | 20.8 | 24.3 | 33.5 | 39.6 | 22.0 | 24.0 |
| | 5 years or more | 92.3 | 79.2 | 58.3 | 60.0 | 60.7 | 48.5 | 47.8 | 48.7 | 66.6 | 53.7 |
| Number of children | 1–2 | 56.5 | 73.6 | 27.8 | 22.2 | 59.1 | 64.1 | 62.2 | 51.3 | 46.2 | 37.7 |
| | 3–4 | 39.7 | 23.6 | 34.7 | 46.7 | 37.5 | 30.2 | 33.5 | 44.3 | 31.5 | 34.9 |
| | 5 or more | 3.8 | 2.8 | 37.5 | 31.1 | 3.4 | 5.7 | 4.3 | 4.4 | 22.3 | 27.4 |
| Residence of current partner | Origin | 78.8 | 65.1 | 47.4 | 52.8 | 41.5 | 56.3 | 44.6 | 48.4 | 80.7 | 23.5 |
| | Destination | 21.2 | 32.6 | 47.4 | 33.3 | 52.6 | 35.2 | 54.1 | 45.4 | 18.2 | 75.8 |
| | Elsewhere | 0.0 | 2.3 | 5.3 | 13.9 | 5.9 | 8.5 | 1.3 | 6.2 | 1.1 | 0.7 |
| Children from current union | None | 37.3 | 52.8 | 16.7 | 15.6 | 26.7 | 47.2 | 22.6 | 25.2 | 19.7 | 26.9 |
| | Some | 40.2 | 16.7 | 54.2 | 42.2 | 34.1 | 22.6 | 23.2 | 27.0 | 24.9 | 17.7 |
| | All | 22.5 | 30.6 | 29.2 | 42.2 | 39.2 | 30.2 | 54.3 | 47.8 | 55.4 | 55.4 |
| Children born in past unions live with other parent | None | 8.8 | 68.0 | 68.9 | 47.4 | 17.0 | 60.3 | 76.3 | 11.7 | 10.9 | 19.1 |
| | Some | 9.3 | 4.0 | 11.1 | 26.3 | 15.6 | 9.6 | 8.8 | 5.0 | 14.8 | 23.3 |
| | All | 81.9 | 28.0 | 20.0 | 26.3 | 67.4 | 30.1 | 14.9 | 83.3 | 74.2 | 57.5 |
| Children's country of birth | All origin | 34.9 | 33.3 | 41.7 | 56.8 | 68.2 | 60.4 | 71.3 | 45.2 | 84.3 | 49.4 |
| | All destination | 45.4 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 14.8 | 20.7 | 27.4 | 53.0 | 4.3 | 9.4 |
| | All other | 19.6 | 41.7 | 6.9 | 13.6 | 2.8 | 1.9 | 1.2 | 1.8 | 1.0 | 1.1 |
| | Mixed | 0.0 | 0.0 | 51.4 | 29.6 | 14.2 | 17.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 10.3 | 40.0 |
| Nontransnational parents | N | 115 | 210 | 85 | 103 | 151 | 124 | 155 | 172 | 68 | 199 |
| | % | 35.4 | 64.6 | 45.2 | 54.8 | 54.9 | 45.1 | 47.4 | 52.6 | 25.5 | 74.5 |
| Age | Under 30 years | 23.5 | 16.2 | 4.7 | 13.6 | 4.0 | 9.3 | 1.3 | 9.3 | 0.0 | 19.1 |
| | 30 to 44 years | 64.4 | 75.2 | 61.2 | 57.3 | 50.8 | 66.2 | 79.3 | 83.7 | 52.9 | 66.8 |
| | 45 years or more | 12.2 | 8.6 | 34.1 | 29.1 | 45.2 | 24.5 | 19.4 | 7.0 | 47.1 | 14.1 |
| Level of education | Primary | 5.2 | 8.1 | 4.7 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 6.1 | 1.29 | 2.33 | 38.2 | 42.9 |
| | Secondary | 52.2 | 46.4 | 21.2 | 45.6 | 27.4 | 35.4 | 25.16 | 25.58 | 25.0 | 42.9 |
| | Tertiary | 42.6 | 45.5 | 74.1 | 53.4 | 71.7 | 58.5 | 73.6 | 72.1 | 36.8 | 14.1 |
| Marital status | Single | 10.4 | 19.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.4 | 10.6 | 5.8 | 8.1 | 1.5 | 0.5 |
| | Union | 53.0 | 45.5 | 12.9 | 18.5 | 8.9 | 8.0 | 11.0 | 12.8 | 4.4 | 1.5 |
| | Married | 35.7 | 34.0 | 78.8 | 59.2 | 79.8 | 66.9 | 81.2 | 76.2 | 83.8 | 84.4 |
| | Divorced/Separated | 0.9 | 1.0 | 8.2 | 20.4 | 8.9 | 13.2 | 1.3 | 2.3 | 8.8 | 11.1 |
| | Widowed | 0.0 | 0.5 | 0.0 | 1.9 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 1.5 | 2.5 |
| Duration of residence | 0–2 years | 1.7 | 2.4 | 3.5 | 5.8 | 0.8 | 4.6 | 2.6 | 6.6 | 0.0 | 13.1 |
| | 3–5 years | 4.4 | 0.9 | 14.1 | 13.6 | 5.7 | 11.9 | 14.8 | 22.0 | 4.4 | 15.6 |
| | 5 years or more | 93.9 | 96.7 | 82.4 | 80.6 | 93.6 | 83.4 | 82.6 | 71.4 | 95.6 | 71.4 |
| Number of children | 1–2 | 75.6 | 65.2 | 44.7 | 44.7 | 61.3 | 70.2 | 67.1 | 62.2 | 64.7 | 64.3 |
| | 3–4 | 17.4 | 31.9 | 41.2 | 43.7 | 35.5 | 27.8 | 31.0 | 36.1 | 35.3 | 35.7 |
| | 5 or more | 7.0 | 2.9 | 14.1 | 11.7 | 3.2 | 2.0 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Residence of current partner | Origin | 98.0 | 85.5 | 42.3 | 42.2 | 48.2 | 55.7 | 99.3 | 71.7 | 6.7 | 7.5 |
| | Destination | 0.0 | 10.8 | 48.7 | 42.2 | 50.9 | 43.4 | 0.7 | 21.1 | 91.7 | 92.0 |
| | Elsewhere | 2.0 | 3.6 | 9.0 | 15.7 | 0.9 | 0.9 | 0.0 | 7.2 | 1.7 | 0.6 |
| Children from current union | None | 17.4 | 32.9 | 7.1 | 5.8 | 16.1 | 28.5 | 7.7 | 16.9 | 20.6 | 14.6 |
| | Some | 7.0 | 17.6 | 16.5 | 25.4 | 13.7 | 11.3 | 5.8 | 3.5 | 11.8 | 5.0 |
| | All | 75.6 | 49.5 | 76.5 | 68.9 | 70.2 | 60.3 | 86.4 | 79.6 | 67.7 | 80.4 |
| Children born in past unions live with other parent | None | 55.2 | 100.0 | 57.9 | 78.4 | 48.6 | 71.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 15.8 | 44.7 |
| | Some | 3.4 | 0.0 | 15.8 | 2.7 | 11.4 | 5.0 | 95.2 | 100.0 | 5.3 | 0.0 |
| | All | 41.4 | 0.0 | 26.3 | 18.9 | 40.0 | 23.3 | 4.8 | 0.0 | 79.0 | 55.3 |
| Children's country of birth | All origin | 5.2 | 10.5 | 12.9 | 9.7 | 8.9 | 13.9 | 9.0 | 11.6 | 11.8 | 16.1 |
| | All destination | 10.4 | 25.7 | 24.7 | 17.5 | 45.2 | 38.4 | 21.3 | 29.1 | 67.7 | 59.3 |
| | All other | 84.4 | 63.8 | 37.7 | 34.0 | 32.3 | 40.4 | 69.7 | 59.3 | 1.5 | 0.5 |
| | Mixed | 0.0 | 0.0 | 24.7 | 38.8 | 13.7 | 7.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 19.1 | 24.1 |

Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not total 100%.

Source: TCRA (2011), TCRAf-Eu (2011), MAFE (2009, 2011).

formation trajectories of transnational mothers and fathers. A trajectory is an ordered list of states, and each state refers to a value of a categorical variable describing the status of individuals at a given point in time. Sequence analysis allows analysing (typical) life course trajectories, taking into account their timing, sequencing, and quantum (Abbott, 1995; Billari, Fürnkranz, & Prskawetz, 2006).

We analyse family formation histories (i.e., the formation and dissolution of relationships and having children) between 18 and 35 years of age of those who were transnational parents at time of interview. The studied age bracket between 18 and 35 captures the respondents

in their young adulthood, which is the age range most people start relationships. Sequence analysis is best suited for sequences that are complete and of equal length (Robette & Thibault, 2008); therefore, we had to restrict our sample to respondents for whom we had information about the entire 18-year period. Respondents who were younger than 35 at the time of the survey were dropped. Furthermore, the sample was restricted to individuals who already had a child at age 35 (see “reduced sample” in Table 2). To create the alphabet to perform sequence analysis, we combined two variables: relationship status and whether the respondent has children.⁴ The final alphabet contains

TABLE 4 Results of significance tests comparing (non)transnational fathers and mothers at the time of survey

| Indicators | Main results Pearson chi ² tests for different origin countries | | | | |
|--|--|----------|-------|---------|---------|
| | Angola | DR Congo | Ghana | Nigeria | Senegal |
| Comparing transnational fathers and transnational mothers | | | | | |
| Marital status | | | | | |
| More transnational fathers are in an union than transnational mothers (more single) | *** | | *** | | ** |
| More transnational fathers are married than transnational mothers | *** | | *** | | ** |
| Residence of current partner | | | | | |
| There are more transnational fathers than transnational mothers who have their current partner at origin (or elsewhere) | ** | | ** | * | *** |
| Children from current union | | | | | |
| Transnational fathers more likely to have all children from their current union than transnational mothers | *** | | *** | | * |
| Children born in past unions live with other parent | | | | | |
| There are more transnational fathers than transnational mothers for whom the other parent lives with the children in the country of origin | *** | | *** | *** | ** |
| Children's country of birth | | | | | |
| There are more transnational fathers than transnational mothers with children only born in the country of origin | *** | * | | *** | *** |
| Comparing nontransnational fathers/mothers and transnational fathers/mothers | | | | | |
| Marital status | | | | | |
| More nontransnational mothers are in an union than transnational mothers (more single) | *** | | * | | |
| Nontransnational mothers are more often married, transnational mothers more often in unmarried unions | *** | | | | |
| Nontransnational fathers are more often married than transnational fathers | *** | * | | | |
| Residence of current partner | | | | | |
| There are more transnational fathers who have their current partner at origin (or elsewhere) than nontransnational fathers | *** | | * | *** | *** |
| There are more transnational mothers who have their current partner at origin (or elsewhere) than nontransnational mothers | *** | * | ** | *** | *** |
| Children from current union | | | | | |
| Nontransnational mothers more likely to have all children from their current union than transnational mothers | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| Nontransnational fathers more likely to have all children from their current union than transnational fathers | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| Number of children | | | | | |
| Transnational fathers have more children than those with all children at destination | *** | *** | | | *** |
| Transnational mothers have more children than those with all children at destination | | *** | | | *** |

Note. We performed tests for the following characteristics: relationship status, socio-economic and legal status, duration of residence, size of social networks, employment status, level of education, country of residence of the current partner and of the parents of the children, type and place of union formation, age and number of children, time of birth of children in relation to migration, whether children are from the current union, whether the respondent has children born outside a union, and whether there has been reunification with children. Only results are shown for relations where there is a significant relationship in at least two flows.

Source: TCRA (2011), TCRAF-Eu (2011), MAFE (2009, 2011).

Significance levels:

* $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

six different states: (i) Single, no child; (ii) single, with child; (iii) in a relationship, no child; (iv) in a relationship, with child; (v) single, divorced/separated, no child; and (vi) single, divorced/separated, with child. The differences in family formation trajectories between mothers and fathers are calculated using a dissimilarity matrix (Studer, Ritschard, Gabadinho, & Müller, 2011).

5 | FINDINGS

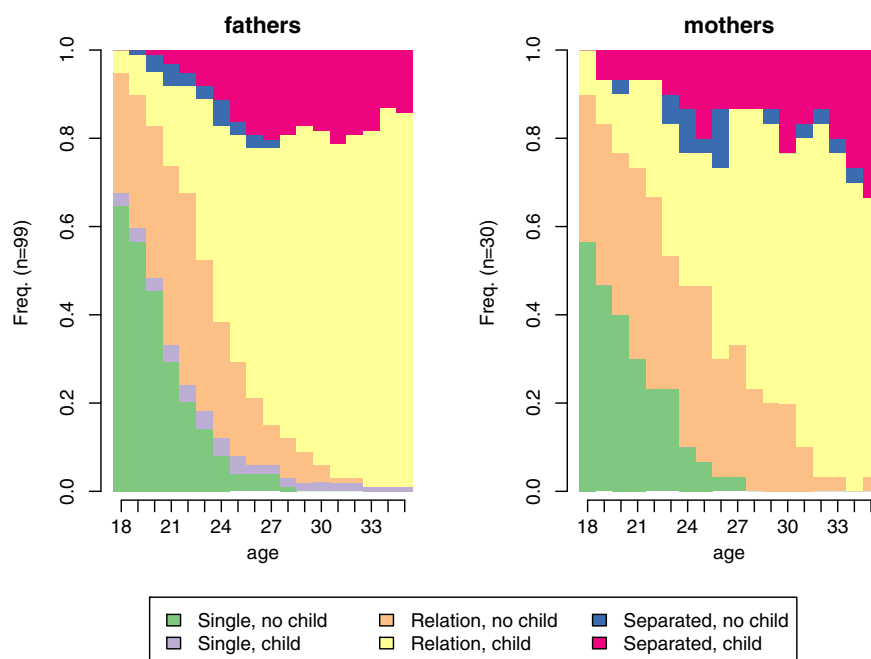
Table 3 provides descriptive statistics of the characteristics of transnational and nontransnational parents, by origin country and sex. Several similarities and differences between transnational fathers and mothers appear, showing that there are structural differences between both groups. With regard to education, transnational parents are highly educated, with more than half of the sample having at least some tertiary education for most of the origins. Only the Senegalese are on average lower educated, with more than 50% of the transnational parents having only primary education. Although transnational fathers are more highly educated compared with the mothers among the Congolese, Ghanaians, and Nigerians, Angolan mothers have on average a higher educational level than the fathers. Regarding marital status, single transnational parents are rare or non-existent for Congolese and Senegalese transnational parents and are most frequent for Angolan women with 38.9% of the transnational mothers being single at time of the survey (Angolan fathers: 13.9%). In line with national statistics, single motherhood is frequent among Angolan women (Nzatzuzola, 2006). Furthermore, although approximately the same share of parents is divorced for most of the countries, Ghanaian transnational mothers are more often separated compared with fathers (17.0% against 5.1%). Regarding duration of residence at destination, most of the transnational parents from all origin countries reside 5 years or more at the respective destination. Overall, transnational fathers reside

longer at destination than the mothers. Transnational parents from DR Congo and Senegal are the ones with the largest family size.

Finally, several migration-related differences between transnational fathers and mothers appeared. The most striking difference can be found for the Senegalese, where three out of four mothers are together with their current partner at destination, against 18.2% of the fathers. This confirms that female independent migration is still rather scarce among the Senegalese (Toma & Vause, 2013). Interestingly, a relatively big share of the transnational parents from all origins has their children from past unions only. And finally, the children of Senegalese and Nigerian transnational fathers are mostly born at origin (Nigerian: 71.3%, Senegalese: 84.3%), compared with 45.2% and 49.4% of the Nigerian and Senegalese transnational mothers. Of the Angolan mothers, 41.7% gave birth to their children in a country different to their country of origin or destination, which might be related to the postconflict situation of these women.

Table 3 reveals also important variations between transnational and nontransnational parents, which will be highlighted briefly. Although for most of the African origins there are no big differences between transnational and nontransnational parents in terms of their educational levels, Senegalese transnational mothers and, especially, fathers are lower educated than those who live with their children at destination. Most parents are in a relationship, although the share of married couples varies widely across origin countries, ranging from less than 30% among Angolans to over 80% among the Senegalese. Not surprising, parents who live at destination with their children have resided there longer than transnational parents. Overall, transnational parents have more children than nontransnational parents. This difference is particularly pronounced among the Ghanaian and Senegalese parents. Furthermore, the children of transnational parents were more often born at origin compared with nontransnational parents.

Table 4 presents the indicators for which significant differences across transnational and nontransnational parents and across the



Source: TCRA (2011), TCRAI-EU (2011)

Notes: The difference between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers is statistically significant (Pseudo R-square 0.012, $p=0.0834$)

FIGURE 1 State distribution plot—Angola

sexes were found. The results show that there are important variations in family life characteristics across the different groups. In line with previous studies, men seem to migrate more often alone than women, leaving their wife and children in the country of origin (Dreby, 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila, 1997; Kraler, Kofman, Kohli, & Schmoll, 2011). Women more often join their husbands when they migrate, and when they migrate alone, they are more often single mothers and in a transnational family arrangement.

In line with previous findings, the mother takes up the care of the children when the father migrates, whereas female kin members provide care when mothers migrate (Ákesson et al., 2012; Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Haagsman, 2015; Parreñas, 2005). This is true for most of the origin countries, with the exception of the DR Congo. Transnational parents more often have children from multiple relationships, with the exception of Senegal, where there is no difference between transnational and nontransnational fathers. Although

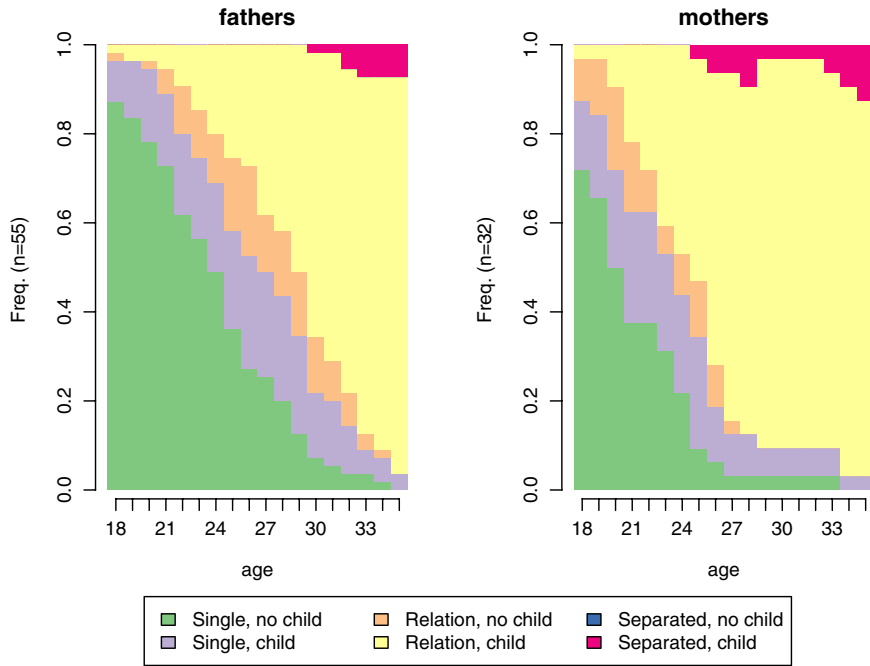
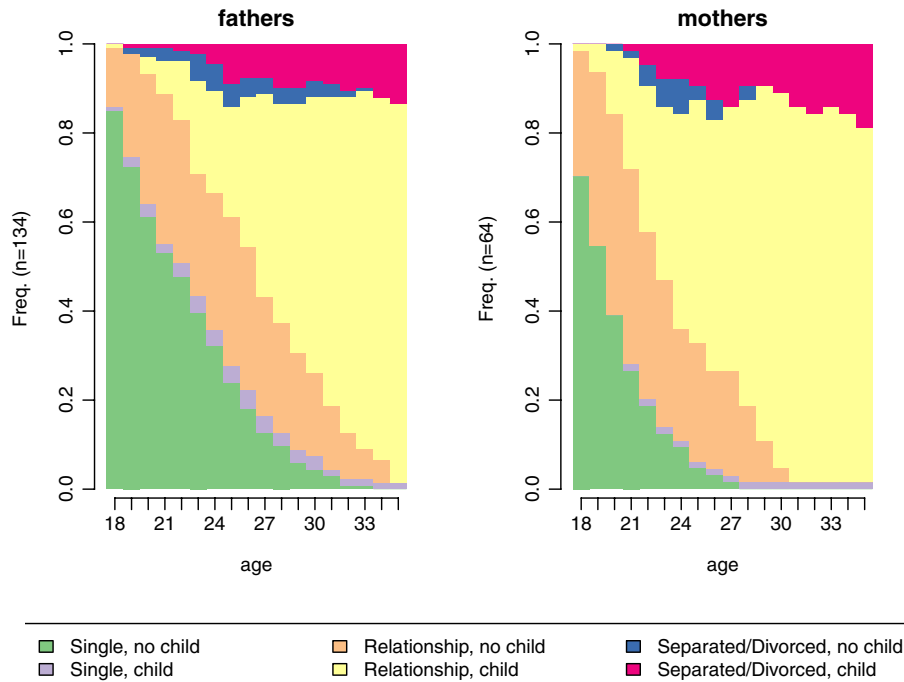


FIGURE 2 State distribution plot—DR Congo

Source: MAFE (2011)
Notes: The difference between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers is statistically significant (Pseudo R-square 0.050, $p=0.0006$)



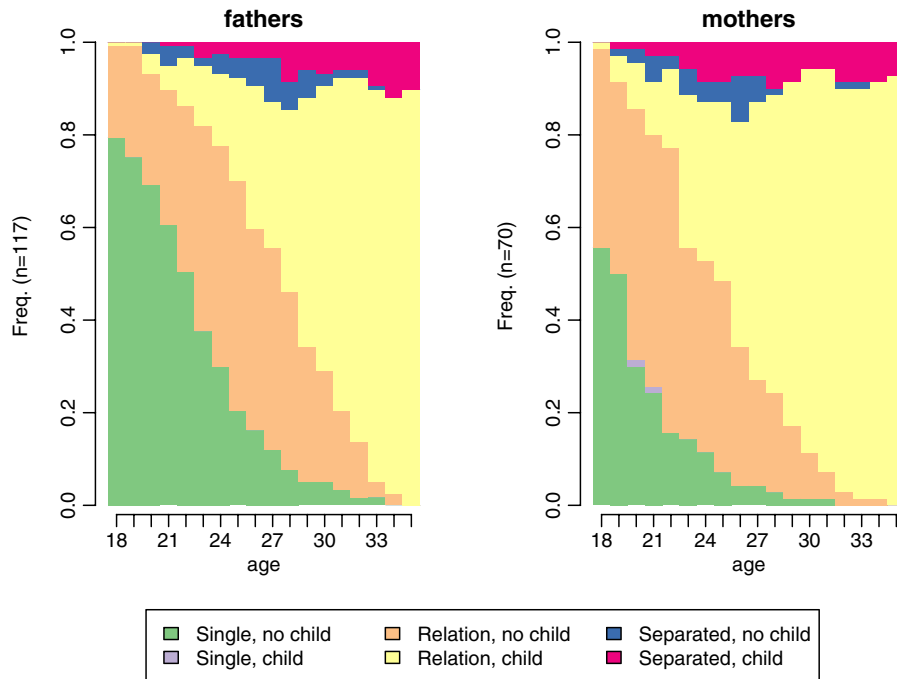
Source: MAFE (2011)
Notes: The difference between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers is statistically significant (Pseudo R-square 0.029, $p=0.0002$)

FIGURE 3 State distribution plot—Ghana

transnational fathers are more likely to have children from multiple relations in most flows, transnational mothers in our sample are also very likely to have children from multiple relations (of all transnational mothers, 53% Ghanaian, 47% Angolan, 73% Senegalese, 84% Congolese, and 77% Nigerian mothers have children from multiple relations).

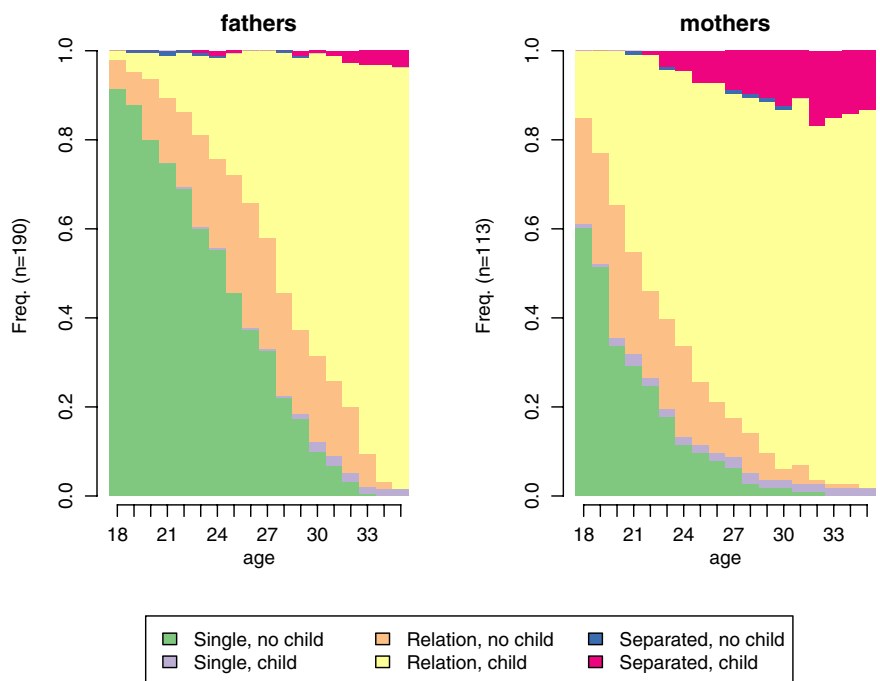
Finally, in the second part of the analysis, family life trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers are compared using sequence

analysis (Figures 1–5). These plots show the distribution of states among individuals at each chronological age. For instance, at age 18, about two thirds of the Angolan fathers in the analytical sample are childless singles, the others are in a relationship with no child or with children, and very few are single with children (Figure 1). The differences between family formation trajectories of fathers and mothers from all five origin countries are statistically significant ($p < .1$, based on Pseudo R squared). Overall, females are younger at union



Source: TCRA (2011), TCRAf-EU (2011)
Notes: The difference between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers is statistically significant (Pseudo R-square 0.039, $p=0.0002$)

FIGURE 4 State distribution plot—Nigeria



Source: MAFE (2009, 2011)
Notes: The difference between family formation trajectories of transnational fathers and mothers is statistically significant (Pseudo R-square, 0.088, $p=0.0002$)

FIGURE 5 State distribution plot—Senegal

formation, and they have the first child earlier, which is not specific for migrants, but corresponding to general demographic behaviours (Fussell & Furstenberg, 2005). Other cross-country differences that are present in the general population in Sub-Saharan Africa can be observed also in the trajectories of transnational mothers and fathers (e.g., age differences between men and women at first marriage, or the share of divorced; Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015).

Furthermore, single parenthood after divorce is relatively frequent among Angolan, Ghanaian, and Nigerian parents and among Senegalese and Congolese mothers in transnational families. Only Senegalese and Congolese fathers seem different in this respect, as there are only very few cases of divorced fathers with a transnational family arrangement. Although rather rare or non-existent in most of the countries, singles with children, who have not been in a relationship before, seem relatively common in the DR Congo. Again, scattered families among migrants from Angola and the DR Congo are very likely to be the result of the conflict situations in these countries (Flahaux & Schoumaker, 2016; Grassi & Vivet, 2014).

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The recent and unique datasets on African migrant families living between Africa and Europe analysed in this paper shed new light on transnational families and offer possible avenues to explore explanations for why maternal migration seems to lead to poorer well-being effects for mothers and children. Until now, the predominant explanation for such findings centres on the strong affective ties between mothers and children and the gendered parenting norms that affect family functioning (Mazzucato & Dito, 2018; Parreñas, 2005). Our work shows that there are structural differences, not only between transnational and nontransnational families but also between male and female transnational families. These structural differences may offer important clues to dynamics that may be involved in affecting mothers and children negatively other than gendered parenting norms.

Our findings point to several important structural differences between transnational families and nontransnational families and between mother's compared with father's transnational families that correspond closely to what family sociologists find make "fragile families" among nonmigrant families (Boynton-Jarrett, Hair, & Zuckerman, 2013; Bzostek & Beck, 2011). Transnational mothers are more often single or in an unmarried union, compared with nontransnational mothers and to transnational fathers. In line with previous studies (Nzatzola, 2006), single mothers are most frequent among Angolans. This may be related to the aftermath of the Angolan civil war leading to scattered families (Grassi & Vivet, 2014). Irrespective of their marital status, when women migrate independently, they are more often in a transnational family arrangement.

There are several possible explanations. Mothers might migrate alone because they are single and need to search for economic means to raise their children. High-income requirements for family reunification in many of the European countries studied are difficult for single parents to meet when employed in low-paying sectors (Beauchemin et al., 2015; Caarls & Mazzucato, 2016; Eremenko & González-Ferrer,

2018; Kraler, 2010). Being single also makes it difficult to raise children while working full time, so women have been found to leave children at origin in the care of their own mothers or sisters as a preferred solution (Åkesson et al., 2012; Banfi & Boccagni, 2011; Parreñas, 2005; Poeze & Mazzucato, 2016). On the contrary, transnational fathers mostly have their child's mother living with the child at origin, which is in line with previous studies stating that mothers take care of the children if the father migrates.

Our findings further showed that transnational parents are more likely to have children from multiple relationships (except for Senegalese parents). Several factors may influence this. The fact that they are more often single means they can start new relationships and new families or because transnational relationships are more vulnerable than relationships where the partners live in the same location (Caarls & Mazzucato, 2015; Pribilsky, 2004). Senegalese and Ghanaian transnational parents have lower educational attainment than their nontransnational counterparts, which might be related to the importance of socio-economic status as a precondition to successfully reunify with one's children or to form a family at destination, at least for these two origin countries (Beauchemin, Nappa, et al., 2015; Caarls & Mazzucato, 2016; Eremenko & González-Ferrer, 2018). Finally, nontransnational parents have lived in Europe longer than transnational parents. Being in Europe for a longer period allows migrants the time to meet the prerequisites and go through the lengthy procedures for reunifying with children at destination and for reunifying with the partner in order to form a family (Caarls et al., 2015; Kraus & González-Ferrer, 2016).

Overall, this study points to three main conclusions. First, transnational families differ from nontransnational families on important sociodemographic and socio-economic characteristics: single parenthood, children from multiple relationships, and lower educational attainment. Second, these findings pertain particular to transnational mothers, as they more frequently face single parenthood and more often are divorced than transnational fathers. In line with more "mainstream" families, transnational mothers also start family life earlier than transnational fathers. Third, this study demonstrates the importance of taking migrants' origin context into account (DeWaard et al., 2018; Mazzucato & Dito, 2018). Family and gender norms in the country of origin and the political context (civil war) not only shape the composition of the migration flow but also seem related to differences in transnational family life and family formation trajectories across groups from different countries of origin.

Our study identifies more issues related to transnational family life and family formation and dissolution trajectories that should be addressed in future studies. Our aim was to understand some of the main structural differences between transnational and nontransnational families, and the differences between father- and mother-away families. Yet the sample sizes have limited the possibility of carrying out multivariate analyses. Future studies can investigate how individual characteristics as well as migration-related characteristics, such as the timing and duration of migration and the specific country of destination, influence these different family formation trajectories of father- and mother-away families.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study is among the few, together with DeWaard et al. also in this issue, that examined

transnational family life across five different migration flows, taking into account the gendered differences within these families. Importantly, it draws questions around the prevailing explanations in policy discourse and academic studies that point to the particularly strong bond between children and mothers, and gendered parenting norms as the reason for the worse well-being and emotional toll of migrant mothers and their “stay-behind” children. Rather, this study indicates that there are important structural differences in the form and characteristics of mother-away versus father-away families that put women at a disadvantage when it comes to conducting their family life at a distance. The findings reveal more fragile circumstances for transnational families in general and transnational mothers in particular. Policies aiming to improve family life of migrants need to consider the disadvantages that migrant women experience in maintaining a family life.

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ENDNOTES

¹ For more information, refer to www.tcra.nl

² For more information, refer to <http://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/>

³ Additional analyses showed that respondents in the MAFE and TCRA Ghanaian flow had similar characteristics. We therefore do not anticipate problems with pooling these datasets.

⁴ Because in some of our flows the custom of polygamy is practiced, ‘in relationship’ can be interpreted as having at least one partner.

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