Contested Fathering

Cameroonian Fathers Facing Parenthood in the Finnish Welfare State

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Abstract

This article focuses on the parenthood experiences of Cameroonian fathers living in Finland. In the analysis, Finland represents a Nordic welfare society in which family relationships are guided by and reflected against national family policies and discourses. The policies are based on ideas of the "proper Finnish family" and the individualistic waves of female liberation, with an emphasis on children's rights. We ask, how the fathers characterize and frame their fathering in relation to the mainstream socio-political, cultural, and national representations and discourses of fatherhood in Finland, which we suggest differ from the Cameroonian ones. The findings are presented as a case analysis of interviews collected among Cameroonian fathers living in Finland with their African spouses. In spite of the diverse family patterns and conditions of the Finnish people, overall the mainstream cultural and national family representation is characterized by equality between parents and between parents and their children. Moreover, the concept of a "good fatherhood" is seen as embodied presence and warm relationships with children. The fathers of our study face difficulties fulfilling these discursive demands, as they cope with another important fatherhood duty – breadwinning, which is particularly challenging because of their often marginalized positions in the labour market. When comparing their fatherhood position in Finland with the one in Cameroon, they also feel embarrassed, especially because the Finnish educational system teaches and encourages their children to challenge their parental authority, which in Cameroon would not be possible.

KEYWORDS: Black African Fathers in the North, discourses of decent parenthood, fathering experiences.

Introduction

Migration is an important topic in the Nordic countries that challenges sociopolitical ideologies (see Ahponen et al. 2014). Yet, even though there exists a great deal of research on migration and the challenges it provides for social policy, only a limited amount of research has been done on black African immigrants' family life and particularly fatherhood. Empirical studies on migration have been carried out in the Nordic countries. However, the studies have mainly focused on the broad consequences of immigration and

discrimination, foreigners as receivers of social benefits (Hytti & Paananen 2003), immigrants' employment and integration (Forsander 2003; Forsander & Similä 2003), the crisis of multiculturalism and women's rights (Phillips & Saharso 2008), and exploration of intersectionality (Flemmen 2008; Hancock 2007). In the international sphere, however, some attention has been paid to the family life of immigrants regarding marriage migrants and transnational families (Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004; Schmidt 2011), and DNA profiling for family reunification (Helén 2014; Helén & Tapaninen 2013). Despite these explorations, there has been relatively little systematic analysis of parenthood among black Africans' Nordic immigrants (see Ebot 2014), even though numerous black Africans have come to the North to stay, as voluntary and educated immigrants aiming to be a part of Nordic societies. Until now, research on Sub-Saharan Africans in the North has also mainly focused on people who have come as refugees or asylum seekers (i.e., from Somalia, Sudan, or the DRC), whereas the other groups of immigrants from this part of Africa have not been studied.

Increased immigration of skilled labour force and the growth of transnational mobility, which are arguably wanted in Finland, have presented the Finnish family system and family-work[1] authorities with a new situation. "Finnish families" are now much more ethnically diverse than ever before. Finland is facing a new wave of black African migrants while trying to become familiar with the phenomenon of immigration more widely. The break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s was the turning point in Finnish immigration history, as the more open borders made it possible for refugees to enter the country. Finland also attained membership in various European organizations, particularly the European Union and the European Council (Lepola 2000). As a country, Finland has been described a latecomer in the field of immigrant reception (Valtonen 2001b).

The literature on Finnish migration research focuses mainly on immigrant integration and discrimination in the public spheres of social life, whereas scholarship on immigrant parenthood from a social sciences perspective is rare (Ebot 2014). Further, the burgeoning multidisciplinary literature on parenthood limits the scrutiny primarily to white heterosexual native Finnish couples as abstract representations of Finnish parents raising Finnish citizens. Marja Peltola's (2014) dissertation, however, is an interesting attempt to include immigrant families in the current sociological discussion of parenthood in Finland. In her analysis of immigrants' interviews, the prevailing stereotypes concerning the propensity of immigrant families to different conflicts in a culturally confusing situation are questioned. However, in our analysis, we challenge some of Peltola's notions because it is important to consider with whom the interviewees are talking about societal and moral themes. Family life, parenthood, and education are themes that raise moral concerns in societies (Durkheim 1973). Family issues are connected with cultural ways of controlling sexuality, as well as intergenerational and gender relationships. Universally, fatherhood is a gendered way of parenting, but it is loaded with different expectations in different cultural contexts.

Based on the arguments of the culturally sensitive nature of fatherhood representations (see Peltola 2014, 22; 26–27), we can deduce that the cultural

1 In the field of Finnish social policy and social work there is a concept and phenomenon of "family work," referring to social work that is directed to improve families material and emotional conditions, supporting families to cope and stay together. The support can be financial, mental, or concrete help in families' everyday routines. In family work, a family worker goes to people's homes and helps in activities such as cleaning, cooking, and providing childcare.

essence and moral loadings of parenthood and family relations in the North are in many ways dissimilar with the Sub-Saharan African ones. In this article, the experiences of being a black African father in Finland are examined. The focus is on black African men's experiences in a presupposed cultural contradiction where the traditional African images of fatherhood are confronted by Nordic models and discourses of the "decent father." The composition of the analysis is qualitative. The data were collected in the metropolitan areas of Helsinki (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, and Kauniainen) from May to June of 2010, in semi-structured face-to-face interviews among Cameroonian fathers who have gained degrees/certificates in higher educational institutions and entered Finland with postgraduate admissions (Ebot 2016). This article concentrates on providing answers to the following questions: *How do Cameroonian men experience their fatherhood as black African fathers in Finland? How do these experiences relate with the Finnish family discourses and fatherhood policies?* In the study, we participate in the emerging sociological discussion of immigrant family experiences in the Nordic societies (Liversage 2015; see also Ochocka & Janzen 2008 for a Canadian context). In our case, however, skin colour is a feature that makes our informants special among immigrants: as black people in Finland, according to many statistical analyses (e.g., Kaartinen 2004), they face the biggest problems in aiming to become socially accepted citizens, in almost every sphere of their lives outside of the home.

The study begins with a short presentation of the cultural script of parenthood and family relations in the Finnish context, with some discussion of Nordic fatherhood, followed by a description of the methodological choices for the analysis. Section 4 presents the themes that emerge from the men's experiences of their fatherhood. After the empirical analysis, concluding remarks, answers to the study questions are presented.

The Cultural Script of 'Welfare State Parenthood'

When we use the term "welfare state parenthood" in this article, we do not suggest any homogeneity of family life and parenthood patterns in Nordic states. Instead, we refer to an idea of discursively constructed representations, which are known by people, of "decent ways" to be a family and act as a mother or a father (Peltola 2014). Discourses of family relations, however, have "executive" power, as well as emotional might: they are mirrors against which individuals reflect their own conditions and practices, which are expressed by talking about their conditions inside these discourses or by justifying their solutions somehow if they do not match with the prevailing discursive expectations. Family policies then, on their part, aim at realizing these representations by creating opportunities for families to make "decent" choices. Behind welfare state family policies, we can recognize a historical development from patriotism to individualism, pointing toward the freedom and responsibility of individual family members.

The Nordic countries, including Finland, construct their self-images as progressive, gender-equal, and sexually liberated nations. They praise themselves for their woman-friendly welfare states and being world champions in the achievement of gender equality (Keskinen 2012; Magnusson et al. 2008; Mulinari et al. 2009). One notable field of this glory is in parenthood, where national and cultural branding is combined to harbour a vision of equal, emancipated, and tolerant citizens. Mainstream cultural and national discourses of Nordic parenthood revolve around not only the long tradition of women's full-time employment but also the notion that gender equality forms the core where shared parenting is accepted as a moral norm (Perälä-Littunen 2007). In these discourses, parenthood is discerned as gender-equal, active, and governed by social policy – whatsoever the real everyday patterns and experiences might be in families.

At the outset, aspects of fatherhood or some fathering goals are consistent across cultures such as ensuring children's safety, helping them progress through the developmental stages, and guiding their moral orientation (Harkness & Super 2006). Nonetheless, ways in which fathers achieve these goals differ according to cultural, environmental, economic, and socio-political contexts (see Bronfenbrenner 1979; Kotchick & Forehand 2002). A critical aspect of successful fatherhood is the availability of services, including mental health, employment, housing, and fathering support. The Nordic countries are pioneers introducing and promoting the parental rights of fathers to take paternity[2] and parental leave,[3] justified to promote both early father–child relationships and gender equality in the family, and labour market (Haataja 2009).

Finnish family policies have tried to realize the "dual-earner/dual-caregiver" family model, which is seen as helping to establish a firm economic foundation for families, women's economic independence, and better relations between fathers and children (Haas & Hwang 2013). For more than three decades, Scandinavian social policies have called for men and women to share breadwinning and childcare (Leira 2006). In this discursive tendency, Finnish fathers are targeted with opportunities to be released from work so that they can stay at home and take care of young children while receiving wage compensation from the state. In Finland, paternal leave was lengthened from two weeks to three in 1993, and it is the longest in the Nordic countries (Haataja 2009). Paternal leave in Finland is taken by almost 90 percent of fathers[4] (see Haataja 2009; KELA 2006; Lammi-Taskula 2007). This new tendency is not just for children: it is also believed that fathers lose much emotionally if they do not become familiar and close with their children. Finnish policymakers are convinced that children's wellbeing is enhanced with policies that promote children having a secure economic base with two working parents (Haas & Hwang 2013; Lammi-Taskula 2006; 2007) and a secure emotional base with two parents who are actively and equally involved in and responsible for their care (Lammi-Taskula 2006; Lundqvist 2011).

Family life in Finland has been, and still is, under continuous public, morally toned examination (Harinen & Koski 2008). Not only are gender relations in families governed by policy ideologies, but also intergenerational relationships have been publicly renegotiated so that the child has become an autonomous subject having much societal power, at least in open conflicts with adults. During the recent decades, discursive ways to define *parenthood* have emphasized equal companionship of parents, their children, and Finnish parents' unwillingness to identify themselves as authoritarian adults for their descendants (Hoikkala 1993). Empirical analyses among immigrants in Finland have noted how these tendencies seem to worry parents who have grown up in an educational tradition stressing adults' authority and

2 Leave was usually taken immediately after the birth of the child, was at most three weeks long, and was used while the mother was also on leave.

3 It is 26 weeks, starting after the mother completes her 18-week maternity leave, and it can be shared between the parents as they wish. Since 2003, if the father took the last two weeks of parental leave, he was entitled to an extra two-week bonus, lengthened to four weeks in 2010. The bonus leave, which is nontransferable, must be used within six months of the end of the parental leave period.

4 A Danish study found that about one-fifth of fathers of preschool-aged children decreased their working time after having children (Fine-Davis et al. 2004). Swedish men's working hours also declined when they became parents, although not as much as women's hours did (Dribe & Stanfors 2009). Norwegian fathers shorten their workweek by one hour when they had preschool-aged children (Dommermuth & Kitterød 2009).

children's obedience (e.g., Alitolppa-Niitamo 2003; cf. Peltola 2014, 28).

Family services and social benefits of the welfare state – as well as their discursiveness – are there for black African parents as well, because they are based on eligibility and residency. However, whiteness is still the major informal signifier of persons in, for example, the labour market, and thus restricting non-white people's possibilities to take full advantage of all benefits of a welfare society. Those marked out according to their non-white bodies are subject to racializing processes even though they may have been born and raised in the country (Hübinette & Lundström 2011, 44). Moreover, their aspirations as parents have been influenced by Finnish ideologies, policies, and parenting practices. The situation of the so-called first generation immigrants from black Africa seems to be the worst when measured by participation in labour, politics, policies, or other emancipating fields of society (Harinen & Kontkanen 2015). This all means that the Cameroonian fathers of this study seem to look at their parenthood from a marginal social position *per se,* because the Nordic success on affirmative action to achieve equality does not touch them. The general narrative of progress obscures the situation and circumstances of less privileged groups (Brandth & Kvande 2015), and in the case of the Cameroonian fathers, their educational achievements do not match their labour-market positions: the middle-class education has not fulfilled its promise in their new home society. To put this in the terms of Pierre Bourdieu (1984), their symbolic capital has not turned to economic capital.

Data and Methods

Sub-Saharan Africans comprise the largest group of Africans living in Finland (Finnish Immigration Service 2013). By the end of 2013, the Finnish Immigration Service recorded 706 Cameroonians living permanently in Finland, and their numbers continue to increase steadily. The majority of Cameroonians moving to the North are Anglophone Cameroonians.[5] These people have left their country to study abroad but sometimes also because of bitter feelings of social misrecognition (Ebot 2016). Many of them stay in the North after their graduation and get married, or cohabit, and have children.

To be included in the study, participants were required to have a black African spouse and children born in Finland (Ebot 2014), because this allows an examination of fatherhood in a new country, at a time when the discursive ideas of Finnish fatherhood have already somehow become recognized by them (see Matta & Knudson-Martin 2006). All of the participants had Christian religious backgrounds at the time of the interviews, which is the dominant religious background of the native population: more than 75 percent of Finns belongs to the Evangelical Lutheran church.[6] The Cameroonian fathers of this study provide a distinctive micro-level demonstration in relation to class. From a pragmatic standpoint, their educational level could be categorized as middle-class; however, they hold working-class jobs (Vincent et al. 2008). As immigrants, they represent a special group of Sub-Saharan Africans in Finland: the Finnish national asylum policies and integration invasions do not touch or support their situation because they are immigrants rather than refugees.

All participants lived in the capital area where

5 Cameroon has a long history where two territories inherited from British and French colonial rules, with different cultural legacies, language, and levels of economic development that have needed to merge (see Konings & Nyamnjoh 2003, 2): Anglophone Cameroon and Francophone Cameroon.

6 http://www.stat.fi/til/vaerak/2009/01/vaerak_2009_01_2010-09-30_tau_007_en.html

they envisage their access and participation in the labour markets as best, living alongside dense networks of public transportation, social and health services, education, and cosmopolitanism[7]. They work as cleaners, cooks, dishwashers, bus drivers, nurses (taking care of elderly people), and post-delivery men (newspaper delivery at night or early morning) (Ebot 2014). They came to Finland from a communal-orientated culture where discipline, respect, and obedience are enforced and expected in childrearing. Most of them were young adults (their mean age being 29.75 years) at the time they first arrived in Finland and have lived permanently in Finland for at least three years. They are the first generation of Anglophone Cameroonian fathers in Finland that is understood to be a group with a common country of origin, without any assumption that there is any other strict homogeneity within the group (Ebot 2016). Among them, there is diversity in terms of language (mother tongue), cultural heritage, cultural identity, and political views.

The main aim of this analysis is to understand the experiences of fatherhood among heterosexual Cameroonian fathers in Finland. The empirical data were collected in English from 16 fathers in Helsinki, the capital city of Finland, which comprises the municipalities of Helsinki, Vantaa, Espoo, and Kauniainen. The selection procedure of respondents was purposeful, seeking persons with knowledge and experience about the issue, and talking with them until what was heard provided "an overall sense of the meaning of a concept, theme, or process" (Rubin & Rubin 1995, 71–76). Contacts were initiated simultaneously in many directions through personal and community circles. Individuals were met sometimes in a bar, at a coffee canteen, in a car, or in a reading room, but mostly they were met in their homes, by the first author of this article. Interviews lasted between one and three hours, and there was always time for discussions and narrative reports. The respondents understood their rights in terms of discontinuing the interview process at any time. Their privacy and anonymity have been respected, and the names (pseudonyms) used are simply an extension of the authors' formulated coding. In this case, the interviewer and interviewees were all Cameroonians and male, which inevitably generated different information compared to a Finnish female interviewer (cf. Peltola 2014). In epistemological terms, this implies discussions: problems concerning family life were discussed more openly owing to the cultural closeness and shared understanding that promotes open-minded discussions but also may lead to moments where some issues taken as "cultural self-evidences" were not explicated aloud.

The interviews included questions on background information such as educational and employment in the country of origin and purposes of leaving Cameroon and deciding to come to Finland. Family-related issues were discussed, as well as the men's employment history. Stories about their own upbringing, their parenting experiences in Finland, approaches to and ideas of fathering, and values they are transferring to their children were all discussed. The data were collected within a larger research project concerning Sub-Saharan African parenthood in Finland from many different angles, and nationalities. The relevant data on the Cameroonian interviewees' experiences and understandings of fatherhood were analysed for this article.

We relied on phenomenological methodology where conceptual insights based on hermeneutic interpretations from interview narratives were constructed to organize an analysis of experiences

7 The capital area on Finland is the most multicultural part of the country: more than half of the immigrant population lives there (Statistics Finland 2012; City of Helsinki Urban Facts 2012).

linked with fatherhood. In doing this, we traced expressions where the fathers' experiences could be interpreted inside our conceptual frames of "decent" parenthood representations in Finland, and cultural confusion around them. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken according to the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), who state that qualitative data are transcribed and coded into clustering semantic themes related to the research questions. In this case, the data were arranged according to themes, which we will discuss in the following section. Citations from the research data have been distinguished from the body text by using indentations.

African Fatherhood in the North: Hope, Fatalism, and Contestations

This section presents the results of the empirical analysis. When interviewees pondered their fatherhood, the main themes that emerged were the problems they face in coping in labour markets and shared expectations of a better future for their kids. Their aim as "upbringing" fathers seems to be in raising their children to learn to act in ways that are as Finnish as possible, to please the society and to fit in. When fathering experiences come up against structural conditions and pressures, intergenerational equality becomes a target of their reflections. This ideology erodes their traditional fatherhood authority, which they see as a confusing loss.

From hope to fatalism

The fathers look at their new society from marginalized social positions. Thus, many expectations concerning their descendants' future contain a wish of getting rid of marginalization. In this, they do not differ from the immigrant parents interviewed by Peltola who also emphasize the importance of the children becoming "somebodies" in Finnish society: decent and autonomous subjects of a societal community (Peltola 2014, 140–43). As immigrants, however, they recognize having extra troubles in escorting their descendants to a materially and emotionally safe future, among the different expectations evolving from both Finnish and their "own people's" values (Peltola 2014). This same wish is also present in the data analysed for this article: One theme or frame for Cameroonian fatherhood in Finland can simply be referred to as "hope for a better future," not for them but for their descendants. When talking about themselves as fathers, the Cameroonian men campaign, both mentally and materially, for space and recognition for their children in the future Finland. In this, they actually do not differ much from the classical Finnish (maybe even universal) parental mission: "if only the life of my children would be easier than mine." (Ambe). In the theme, the future of children is reflected against the parent's own current problems, and in the case of these fathers, the biggest concrete difficulties, repeatedly, are racism, discrimination based on skin colour, and marginal positions in the labour market – social signifiers feeding each other.

> AMBE: "My family is one of hope," I mean we have many hopes on these children and of course responsibilities too. We are strongly representing ourselves in terms of bringing up these children in Finland, in order that they respect and grow in the Finnish spirit. Our greatest point of achievement would be to see these kids grow, go to school, and get a career job.
>
> EBOT: What do you mean by career job?
>
> AMBE: I'm referring to the Finnish system because it's not that Africans don't have the academic qualifications to be hired by Finnish companies – the problem is that of trust and a very complex issue. There is another issue of nationality because you have guys who come from UK, USA, and Canada with just a diploma (no university degree, no Finnish language proficiency) but they have good jobs

> in companies. Of course, Finns of our generation tend to hide behind the issue of language, skin colour and many other things – blocking black immigrants from the job market. So, I am still fighting, but my children would probably not fight the same fight (29-year-old father of two children, working as a newspaper delivery person, with a BA in law).

This father frames his family as one of hope, reflecting it against the humiliation and externality he has experienced. In this, he is also hinting that in these frames, it is often wise to teach the children to act in a Finnish way and to accept the prevailing Finnish values. When talking about their children, these fathers willingly see them as part of the new generation in Finland. The children's future possibilities are reflected against their own experiences and life histories as first-generation immigrants who have to wade through difficulties that follow one another. Fathers dream that their children will have a career job – something in line with their education, skills, and capabilities – thus referring to a possibility of the children rising above their fathers' destinies, which are felt as unfair (Ebot 2016). In discursive constructions concerning nationality Finnishness is conceptualized as non-questioned whiteness (Gordon 2000), and the Cameroonian fathers expected this representation to widen so that their children could achieve the benefits of "education society" and narrow the gap between competencies and working possibilities experienced by them (see Harinen & Sabour 2014).[8] The fathers hope that their children can create a good future for themselves by mastering the Finnish language, knowing more about Finnish traditions, and knowing how to interact with the host society better compared with people of their own generation, who came to Finland when they were already adults. In this, the fathers associate their descendants with a positively defined global generation (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2009; Harinen & Kontkanen 2015) with multicultural competences (understanding many cultures, coping with different people, managing many languages, and getting rid of strict patriotism) that "liquid modernity" according to Zygmunt Bauman (2000) insists from citizens.

For these men, hope lies in the open future because the present is much more restricted. Despite the attitudes of hope, the interviewed fathers expressed depressing fatality when describing their own situation as the expected breadwinners and supporters for their families. The source for this fatalism lies in their unsafe and unfair labour-market positions, which remind us about Elli Heikkilä's notion of a strong association between nationality and unemployment in immigrant vulnerabilities (Heikkilä 2005; Peltola 2014, 92–93; also Könönen 2015). How can the father support the family and ensure the future education of the children in an unsecure labour-market position with unsecure and low-income expectations? Paradoxically, the fear of losing even this loose position ties these men tightly to work: you do not dare to get rid of it even it does not fill the expectations raised by high-level education.

> SHUAKA: As a black man, even if you speak the language or acquired citizenship it will not help you as far as jobs are concern. They will prefer to train a native Finnish child than to give that job to a black man even if you are a Finnish citizen, black citizen. Finnish society is a very conservative society. Even if you look at the EU statistics Finland is among the least that integrates black people, Sweden is more than Finland (…). Most companies in Finland don't employ black Africans; they find anything black to be a threat. And

8 "Education society" by definition means a society where schooling is valued and supported in public fields and where participation in formal education is a prerequisite for social and societal success of citizens (see Harinen & Sabour 2014).

> it is very common that you are paid less than a white Finn if you do the same job. I know company like ITELLA[9] who pays black guys differently from white guys for this newspaper delivery at night. Just imagine, these Africans are married with children like Finns, they live in the same rental apartments in the neighbourhoods, and they shop in same groceries markets. (34-year-old father of two children, working as a post-delivery person, with a BA in hospital management)

Shuaka's experiences remind us how black African men are often outside the Finnish "colour scheme" of companies, regardless of their degrees, skills, and competences. Finnish embodiment still seems to be standardized tightly, and exclusion based on the category of skin colour is strong (Lappalainen 2009). In addition, the interviewed fathers as breadwinners for their families reiterated being humiliated and paid less just because of their skin colour. In this, the men also question the idea of Finland as a modern state with universalistic values based on equality (see also Ahponen et al. 2014; Eydal & Rostgaard 2015). Even though social-political aspirations of the welfare state have to an extent managed to narrow the gender gap in family life, they have not been able to govern the nationality gap or the skin-colour gap of the labour market (see also Könönen 2015). This failure has straight implications for parenting experiences because these fathers have to concentrate primarily on securing their labour possibilities, under the unpredictable conditions of the employer. The theme presented in the following subsection is also tightly linked with this idea of oppressing fatality.

Being the Sole Provider

Traditionally, the role of the mother has been central in child rearing (e.g., Harinen & Koski 2008). In contemporary public Finnish discussion about family relations, however, the role of father is emphasized (Holmström 2012; Pääkkönen 2009). More so, discussion around so-called quality time is wide. It is emphasized that parents should do something emotionally enjoyable (e.g., play) with their children, not just take care of their basic physical needs (see Ylikännö et al. 2015). These discourses have had concrete implications, and extended leave-time use of Finnish fathers can be seen to indicate the effectiveness of family policies with regard to the daily lives and division of labour between parents (Ylikännö et al. 2015). Finnish fathers of small children (under the age of 7) have been encouraged through family policies to participate in childcare (though they still spend more time working outside the home and doing less household chores or childcare, compared with Finnish mothers (see Pääkkönen 2009).

In the current family political discussion, a child's close relationship with his or her father is seen as an important stimulant for mental development: besides, fathers who are active in child caring arrange space for mothers to work and to be engaged with their own hobbies (see Haas & Hwang 2013). The interviewed Cameroonian fathers are aware of these moral discourses: many of them reported not having a very close relationship with their children, although acknowledging it as something particularly important for them as fathers. They discussed the nature of their work as the most significant hindrance for not acting as embodied, concretely and emotionally caring agents/subjects, and for not spending "quality time" with their children. The challenges that black African fathers face are conveyed in this situation through fathers' emphasis of lack of physical play, outdoor approach to care giving, and teaching children to be tough through sporting events. In this, it seems that they worry that something "manly" is lacking from their children's upbringing – maybe "a model of a man,"

9 ITELLA changed its name back to Posti in 2015, which is a postal-delivery company.

the importance of which is often highlighted by Finnish family workers and researchers of parenthood (see Lammi-Taskula 2007; Oinonen 2008).

> SHUAKA: I know what it means to be a good father but where I find myself, I can't be an ideal dad because I'm always out; I spend little or no time at home. When I'm at home, usually I'm sleeping because of the nature of my job - so I can't really be that ideal father for my children. A good father spends more time with his children, at least 50 percent of his time with his kids – teaching them, taking them out, holding and playing with them, you know! Those kinds of things are what an ideal parent should do for his kids. But, it's difficult because I'm hustling. Here, it's not that easy, you have to hustle man! If you don't hustle, you know, you will be kicked out with bills, so you have to go to work. Sometimes, I don't see my children for days but I have the zeal to spend time with them but the nature of my work doesn't give the opportunity. (34-year-old father working as a post-delivery man, with a BA in hospital management)

Shuaka is the father of two girls, aged three years and five months, respectively, at the time of the interview. As a post-delivery man, he is the lone breadwinner who works during the nights to support his wife and children and sleeps when home. His wife, a holder of a Bachelor's degree in History, had moved to Finland three years earlier and was not working but taking care of the babies and studying the Finnish language. In the case of Shuaka, and many others with at least two jobs, breadwinning responsibilities linked with fatherhood force them to act in a way that leads them to almost apologize for their total absence from their children's everyday lives (cf. Miller 2011; Palkovitz 2002).

Most of the interviewed Cameroonian fathers have become distanced from their children involuntarily. Many black African men are not eligible to access paid parental leave from work, or have been intimidated and threatened beyond requesting it. There also is no guarantee of re-employment at the end of the leave, which would enable them stay home with their newborn children (see Højgaard 1997). These Cameroonian graduates in Finland have voiced their difficulties in finding a job corresponding to their educational qualification, not to mention seeking a permanent employment contract (Ebot 2016). African fathers can be unaware of parental leave, thinking that the scheme is mainly for natives. It is also unknown to them that childcare leave starts after parental leave and can be taken until when the child is three years old. Therefore, they seem to know the moral pressure of family discourses but not the concrete possibilities to benefit from welfare structures to arrange time for themselves with their children. Further, many black African fathers do not avail themselves of parental leave because of the influence one loses when he is absent from work and consequently falling behind on the possible career ladder (Cheal 2008; Peltola 2014, 112). This has been observed also by other researchers, such as Salmi and Lammi-Taskula (2015), who note the pressure of work and family finances as obstacles among fathers taking leave. In this sense, Finland, as a Nordic welfare society, appears not to be very modern but rather it seems to fall in a category of traditional nationalistic entity. As the high rates of unemployment among immigrants have been documented extensively in Finland (see Könönen 2015; Salmenhaara 2008) and elsewhere, for example in Denmark (cf. Liversage 2015), the situation also keeps immigrant fathers of small children on their toes: every "wrong" personal move in working life might be fatalistic in terms of future labour possibilities.

Among others, Säävälä has noted, "Many migrant families are socioeconomically in a disadvantaged situation, characterized by downward social mobility after migration which tends to increase the

risks to health and wellbeing among the children." (Säävälä 2012, 33.) Migrant families, of course, do not form any homogenous proportion of population; neither do black African families in Finland. Their compositions differ, and so do their family histories. The quite complex situation of Ndidi as a father of two children, however, describes the complicated social locations of many immigrants who come from outside Scandinavia or EU countries – that is to say, outside mutual state contracts allowing, for example, full working possibilities in the receiving country.

> NDIDI: Can you believe that they (my children) were born here and are resident here in Finland and the Finnish system does not recognize them? I have been living permanently in this country for five years, but my wife moved from Germany to Finland and applied for a residence permit and it has taken more than one year, getting to two years. She has not yet been given a residence permit and because of that the children are not in the system. In a nutshell, I'm actually living an African life in Finland, meaning that I'm the sole provider. (…) My wife can't support by working too. She doesn't even get any benefits because nothing has been said regarding her residence permit's application in two years; we are still waiting for the permit. It is so disappointing because sometimes one may think because kids are involved they would be some speed up with the things. On papers, you read so nice things about KELA in Finland – there is even a handbook for families. But when it comes to reality, it's a different ball game altogether. My wife has even been to the hospital once and they told her that they can't attend to her unless it's an emergency because she doesn't have a social security number (30-year-old father, working as a cleaner, Master of International Health, University of Helsinki)

The idea that all fathers in Finland are assuming a participatory role, being an equal parent to their children or no longer the distant provider, is problematic. With no social security number, you are not counted, as happens in Ndidi's family – where there is a will to create a system of two breadwinners but now it seems to be difficult. As his spouse and children fall out from all social security benefits promised by KELA (Social Insurance Institution) and linked with child caring, the situation forces the father to work hard and to ensure his labour position in all possible ways, and this, of course, narrows his possibilities to be bodily present in his children's lives.

Criteria for "decent" family relations and family members' roles are cultural and differing: family is a normative construction, and the normative expectations for family members vary culturally (Peltola 2014, 22; 26–27; 133). Thus, Cameroonian fathers' talk contains references to family responsibilities that have traditionally been considered as male duties in their original culture: breadwinning and material security (see also Liversage 2015). The breadwinner role is a socially accepted moral identity for a man in the original society of these Cameroonian fathers. Fathers without jobs in such societies are viewed with particular suspicion as lazy, not manly enough – or considered a "woman wrapper" (used by women to cover their lower body from the waistline to the ankles and sometimes, another decorative wrapper accompanies it). In this sense, the interviewed fathers can be satisfied with themselves:

> NDIDI: For me an ideal father is reflected in how you take care of your family and how you go about your family business. How you prioritize your family? Do you make sure their needs are met? Because even with all the difficulties I face, my children and wife are still well catered for. The house, bills, everything is still okay. It makes one feel happy that you are doing everything you are supposed to do. You are on the right track because at the end of it all, it boils down to family as far as I'm concerned.

Contested authority

Family is both a cultural and a hierarchical construction (Peltola 2014, 124). A traditional representation of a nuclear family in patriarchal societies locates intra-familial domination into fatherhood. The politics of gender equality, however, have, to an extent, systematically nibbled on fathers' dominant positions in Finnish families. The intergenerational relationships in Finland have drifted away from an ideology of parental authority, to a more equal bond between children and adults (Hoikkala 1993). This cultural feature is often seen by immigrant parents who are used to different models of childrearing, as an immoral and devastating way to treat children (cf. Alitolppa-Niitamo 2003; Liversage 2015; Peltola 2014, 28, 169–70). Peltola (2014, 26–28) challenges this perception as a stereotype or mantra with which cultural differences are offered as an "easy" explanation for immigrants' family problems, as in her study, immigrant parents did not report having notable problems in their parenthood authority. This, however, seems to be a methodological issue: a Cameroonian man interviewing Cameroonian men gets different answers than a female Finnish interviewer would.

The formally equal position of Finnish children with adults is not only a cultural flow of the *zeitgeist*; it is also supported by legislation, and parents can even be punished publicly if their childrearing methods do not respect the autonomy of a child. This tendency is linked with Finland's commitment to the Universal Declaration of Children's Rights by the UN (1989), and the Finnish children seem to be very aware of the position given to them (for example, some children have taken their parents or teachers to court demanding punishment for their harsh behaviour toward them and usually, the children have won these cases). Yet, the relationship between adults and children raises contradictory reactions in the public discussion of upbringing in Finland. Some would like to return to the educational culture where parental authority is not questioned. Moreover, the interview data reveal how the Cameroonian fathers condemn what they call the "*laissez faire*" parenting style used in Finland, without alternative strategies that could be implemented to discipline children and adolescents. The fathers also pointed out differences or tensions between Finnish laws and cultural norms, and their own cultural parenting beliefs and practices. Within this tension, the fathers see themselves as helpless and deactivated; the system is too strong and has such discursive power that it cannot be turned over in individual family lives. In this theme, having their children become as Finnish as possible is no longer as desirable (not as it was in the theme of "future hope"); rather, Finnishness makes the children's behaviour unpromising and puts parents into a very obscure relationship position. Notably, these fathers recognize the "system" as their parental enemy, instead of, for example, the temptations of the Western youth culture, often offered as an explanation for intergenerational conflicts of immigrant families (see Peltola 2014, 28).

MBARA: You can't influence the behaviour of your child in Finland for sure; it's very complicated.

EBOT: What do you mean?

MBARA: Let me tell you, the fact is that the child goes to the kindergarten and everything she does, she learns from there. Irrespective from what you tell the child at home, it will be very difficult to influence that child. Also, the Finnish society is a society where young people don't have respect for adults. They can insult you; they can say anything they want to say to you, they don't care. They call you by your name. Calling somebody by name is not even a problem for me; the fact is that if you don't respect elders it is a very big issue in

Cameroon. We have that barrier; you know where your limit ends. In Finland, the case is different, they don't respect elders, and they can even insult you. Can you imagine, my child told me that I'm too hard on her?

EBOT: How did she say that?

MBARA: She said in Finnish, *Sä oot liian ankara mulle*, which means, *you are too hard on me*. She doesn't want to speak any English, only Finnish. Look at the person…three years old. And! All this is because of the kind of pampering treatment she is having at day care (28-year-old father, working as a nurse, with a BA in nursing).

NIGE: Let me also tell you an example of a friend of mine who is married to a Finn with children. She told her 10-year-old daughter once that she has cooked food for her to eat but her daughter rudely told her she doesn't want that food that she wants McDonalds. When the mother said she doesn't have money for McDonalds, the child said what do you mean you don't have money; don't they pay you my child's support money? You should have money for that. Just imagine, this is an insult in the African context. Another example, as well, is my Tanzanian friend who is a single dad. He got angry and shouted at his six-year-old daughter, and his daughter was like, if you scream again, I am going to call the police.

EBOT: What did your friend say to that?

NIGE: Nothing actually, but after the incident he asked his child why she said she is going to call the police. Then the child said they had told them in preschool that if their parents are shouting at them they should call the police. (37-year-old father, working as a cleaner, with a Diploma in nursing)

The fathers of this analysis experience that the Finnish law plays too powerful and significant a role in how parents should bring up their children. Further, from their point of view, children are taught about their rights at a very early age, enabling them to challenge parents with quite strong arguments. Even though homes are defined as private areas for families, their walls are, in a sense, transparent in societies where government officials have a strong professional status in defining a "good life" (Harinen & Koski 2008). Therefore, the realm of the personal doubles as a public-policy arena (Oinonen 2008, 90) because the state impinges both intentionally and unintentionally on the personal (Castles 1998). In this sense, the parents have to be careful not to end up as targets of the controlling invasions of police or social workers. An immigrant parent must be even more cautious compared with a native one, because authorities look at immigrants with a much stronger suspicion than they do at natives (Könönen 2015).

The fathers who were interviewed for this study are frustrated by the issue of disrespect that they see as strange when compared with what they learned in Cameroon. They are also convinced that the perceived role of day care officials and police encouraging children to challenge parents' authority (see Lewig et al. 2010) is in some way linked with the government's financial support of children (Child's benefit is a monthly paid state support to children less than 18 years old. The monthly paid amount is approximately 100 euros per child). In this, they seem to repeat the classical socio-philosophical idea of an exchange between freedom and security: If you want social security, you have to give your freedom and authority away at the same time.

LAD: The state gives you money (child's benefit), which is good, but at the same time, it's like they are buying 80–90 percent shares of your rights over your children.

It is stated in many studies that one fundamental cultural difference between African societies and Western societies is that the former is communally focused (collective) and the latter is individually focused. Psychologists, also reflecting on interdependence and independence, have described these two cultural ideologies (Kağitçibaşi 1997; Markus & Kitayama 1991). This ideological juxtaposition has also sometimes been questioned (Peltola 2014, 26–29), but the fathers in this study seem to recognize the tension in their family lives, where the younger generation does not self-evidently follow the normative Cameroonian behaviour rules. All of the participating fathers come from a country with a socialization curriculum emphasizing obedience, respect for authority, and conformity to the customary norms (Keller et al. 2005, 231). The use of physical discipline and punishment is accepted as an appropriate parenting practice and a reflection of both parental authority and child morality (Chalmers 2006). Although, as one interviewed father explained, not all Cameroonian families use punishment as a form of discipline, in some communities it is even acceptable for other members of the community aside from the parents to discipline the child physically. This is also argued by Kerry Lewig with his colleagues (2010), who have studied challenges to parenting in the cultural context of South Australia.

Legislation and family policies both shelter and make traps for Cameroonian fathers in Finland. They affect their families both in ideological and practical terms. For instance, while access to day care is guaranteed for all children, with free meals, health care, and pre-primary education, it also symbolizes the importance of care work evaluated and controlled by the state (Lammi-Taskula 2007). In other words, the welfare structures provide possibilities and help in childcare, but when defining intergenerational relations and positions, they also penetrate into intra-family conflicts and even criminalize parental practices that do not blend into their agenda, which seems to astonish these fathers repeatedly.

> NIGE: Children in Finland can call the police on their parents. In African, if you call the police on your parents, instead, the police will discipline you in front of your parents because the police officer himself would probably be a parent.

Concluding Remarks

A consensus among Finnish family researchers is that family life and gender relations have undergone remarkable transformations over recent decades (Böök & Penttinen 1997; Halme et al. 2006; 2009; Häggman-Laitila & Euramaa 2003). The domains of family formation, gender positions, roles, and attitudes have changed, and intergenerational relations have undergone a notable modification within the waves of contemporary individualism. Family in Finland, however, is not only a private issue: public moral discussions in the country even concentrate on families, parenthood, and child upbringing (Harinen & Koski 2008). Family policies, then, attempt to turn this moralism into family practices: emphasis on "fatherhood presence" in families is one example.

This analysis offers one look at some black African father's fatherhood experiences in their new home country in the North. The analysis shows how these men can feel like absent subjects and "bad fathers," even though they are performing moral fathering practices that have traditionally been considered the main male duties and resources for masculinity in their former life: breadwinning and security ensuring. This experience of being "not good enough" has its roots in circumstances where these men reflect their everyday lives against the welfare state family ideology, where shared parenthood and fathers' concrete

presence in their children's lives form the moral nucleus of the child care of families. These fathers have to continuously campaign to manage in fulfilling their breadwinning duties and thus give up their more emotional presence in their families. Fathers of this analysis think that being available for their children and spending time in parental nurturing are vital elements of parenthood, but they still emphasize fatherhood breadwinning as a necessity for their family to survive. For them it is difficult to benefit, for example, from parental leave supported by the state, because it would be a risky choice in their unsecure labour-market positions. Thus, these men cannot truly be seen as equal father citizens of the welfare state, and they recognize this as something lacking from them.

In the light of national statistics, the Cameroonian men of this study, as well as other black African first-generation immigrants, are typically marginalized and disadvantaged in Finland, forming a group of immigrants who are both discriminated against (Kaartinen 2004) and disrespected (Ebot 2014). Our analysis shows as well that, as fathers, these Cameroonian men face additional challenges compared with the mainstream Finnish fathers. They cannot be as present for their children because their labour-market positions are vulnerable, and they are not always aware of all of the social security benefits directed at fathers living in Finland. If their spouses fall away from the maternity clinic, the families often remain without information about all of the possible support to which they could be entitled. Thus, there is a wish to get benefits from welfare state supply, to be treated equally as a father citizen. However, the possibility of welfare state authorities' assistance is not seen only as positive: from their perspective, "the system" can put unwanted ideas into their children's heads, which then leads to intrafamilial conflicts because the young ones can turn away from their parents (see Liversage 2015). This, however, is not exceptional, because immigrant fathers from other patriarchal cultures, such as Denmark, for example, tend to lose their position of respect in their families (Liversage 2015). We have shown how many Cameroonian fathers experience an intersection of tensions generated by economic class, race, state control, and their family's own desires. Notably, it is not easy for them to arrange their everyday conditions to achieve their aspirations as fathers as lived reality.

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