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RESEARCH ARTICLE

MIGRATION AND GENDER RELATIONS IN OUT-MIGRANT HOUSEHOLDS IN SOUTHWEST CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

Migration by sub-Saharan Africans to Europe and North America has gained significant media attention and interest from migration scholars in the past two decades. African migrants represent about one-third of global migrants. Migration statistics from mid-year 2020 suggest that Africans make up at least 25.4 million of the 281 million people residing outside their countries of birth. The feminization of international migration has equally been increasing over the past twenty years, resulting in a growing interest in gender-responsive approaches to migration studies among feminist migration scholars. The need for more scholarship on the gendered experiences of male and female migrants, likewise the effects of migration on transformation in gender roles and gender relations are constantly being echoed by feminist migration scholars. This paper is an attempt in this direction. It interrogates how the out-migration of men and women from South West Cameroon affect gender role, gender relation, and hierarchies in migrant households, based on the narratives of non-migrant household members left behind. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ninety-seven participants (68 from male-led and 29 from female-led migrant households). The assessment of the relationship between gender and migration indicates that gender intersects with patriarchy in shaping household migration decisions, privileging more males and single females, than married females as potential migrants. Findings further suggest that while traditional gender roles of non-migrant women are most likely to be redefined due to male migration, this is not associated with transformations in power relations over household decision-making in favour of women. Conversely, female-led migrants, who are daughters, tend to have more influence in household decision-making as they assume the new status of breadwinners.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a phenomenon that has existed since time immemorial, mostly driven by forces such as slavery, colonialism, capitalism, expanding global economies, and search for economic opportunities (Hiralal, 2018). The concept is being popularised to describe the movement of people from one region to another within same state (internal migration) or from one nation state to another (external or out-migration). It's also a multidimensional and multifaceted social process that takes on different forms with economic migration predominating migration discourses throughout the 20th century (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Black, 2021). Migration by sub-Saharan Africans to Europe and North America has gained significant media attention and also interest from migration scholars in the past two decades. African migrants represent about one-third of the global migrants. Migration statistics from the mid-year 2020 suggests that Africans make up at least 25.4 million of the 281 million people residing out of the countries of birth (Black, 2021). These African migrants are attracted either by economic opportunities of their destination countries, or forced to flee or seek refuge due to conflicts or natural disasters. Historical accounts of migration in Africa could be traced to the transatlantic slave trade and European colonization.

However, more recent studies of migration in Africa have documented significant growth in international migration, as well as an increase in the feminization of international migration. The recent migration trends have been associated with uneven economic development and political transitions (Castles and Miller, 1993; Hatton & Williamson, 2003; Mberu & Pongou, 2012; Todaro, 1976). The observed increase in international migration has been concomitant to an upsurge in female economic migrants, particularly from Africa, just like other third world countries in search of economic opportunities in Western Europe, North America, Southeast Asia and, more recently, Western Asia. Approximately 135 million (about 48%) women economic migrants were recorded between 2017 and mid-2020. Thirty eight percent of the total women migrants were of African origin (Hiralal, 2018; United Nations, 2019; Black, 2021). Migrants from Cameroon make up the large group of migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, mostly in search of economic opportunities, educational opportunities or for family reasons (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], 2019). Statistics on migration in Cameroon from the 1950s to 2022 indicated that the out-migration rates outnumbered in-migration. Although more men than women are likely to migrate, the rate of female migrants leaving Cameroon for North America, Western Europe, South Africa and Asia has witnessed significant increase in the last two decades (United Nations, 2019). In addition to international migration, the feminization

of intra-African migration has also witnessed an increase in recent years (Fall, 2007). Female intra-African migrants mainly include cross-border traders, temporary or circular migrants or long-term settlement migrants (Andall, 2018). Just like other forms of migrations, intra-African migration processes are affected, among other factors by the gender norms of African communities. The increasing feminization of international migration has triggered growing emphasis on gender responsive approaches to migration studies. Although the literature on migration depicts variations in the understanding of gender in international migration, there seems to be a general consensus among migration scholars on the centrality of gender as a key variable of analysis in migration studies. This is contrary to early accounts of migration that completely ignored gender considerations, or treat gender only as a marginal variable in the study of the trends, patterns, processes and consequences of migration (Fan, 2000; Herrera, 2013; Fang, 1997; Hiralal, 2018, etc.). Two distinct approaches to the study of gender and migration can be identified. Earlier approaches described as the 'add women and stir' approach conceptualised gender as a static binary variable determined by the biological sex of migrants (Kofman, *et al*, 2000; Indra, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000). This approach was prominent in the 1970s and limited studies on gender and migration to individual differences in migration experiences of men and women (Herrera & Sahn, 2013; Taylor, 2001). For instance drawing from the experiences of internal migrants in Senegal, Herrera and Sahn (2013), interrogated the extent to which migration decision of young men and women are shaped by the gender of migrants, socio-economic as well as familial factors. Although such an approach to the study of gender and migration treats men and women based on the biological as opposed to gender differences, it was considered a marked improvement in migration studies and improved women's visibility as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries of migration.

More recent studies are characterised by a shift from the study of women to that of gender. Instead of comparing and contrasting the migration experiences of men and women, focus is directed in studying migration as a gendered experience. This new dimension to the study of gender and migration was heralded in the 1984 special issue of the *International Migration Review* which featured several articles that included gender relations, gendered systems of inequality in addition to labour market situation and cultural norms as key variables in analysing the migration decisions and experiences of male and female migrants (Nawyn, 2010). Studies of this nature also focus on the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and gendered institutions in shaping the migration process (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003). While studies on migration and gender relations have witnessed an upsurge, analysis of the nexus between migration and transformations in gender roles, relations and hierarchies in out-migrant households, particularly in the African context has not received significant scholarly attention. This paper is an attempt in this direction and largely informed by the experiences of out-migrant households in Southwest Cameroon. In light of the increasing rates of male and in particular female Cameroonian out-migrants, it is important to evaluate how migrations decisions, experiences and outcomes affect gender roles, gender relations and the hierarchical relationships between men and women in out-migrant households. This paper builds on the above insights, by exploring the influence of migration on gender transformations in out-migrant households in Buea, the capital city of the South West Region of Cameroon. More specifically, the paper interrogates the implication of gender relations in the migration decision of individual men and women migrants; and the transformations in gender roles, gender division of labour and gender relations resulting from the process of migration. We define gender relations in line with Argawal (1997: 1) and Reeves & Baden (2000) as the hierarchical and unequal social relations of power, which ascribes to men and women different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, and behaviour patterns. Although gender relations are manifested in both intra and extra household processes, the household constitutes an important institutional site where such relations are nurtured and transmitted from one generation to the other. The South West Region is one of the two English speaking

regions¹, located about 73 km from Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. Owing to its British colonial history, most inhabitants of the region are comfortable with the English language, while some are fluent in the two official languages of the country (English and French). The Region consists of approximately 1.6 million people (50% female) according to the last population census conducted in 2015 (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). The Region has been restive since 2016, following a crisis that has transformed into a separatist movement (Ekah, 2019). The crisis has caused thousands of inhabitants to flee from the towns and villages across the region to Buea, the capital city of the region. Buea is a cosmopolitan city with a population estimate of 47,000 people (World Population Review, 2022). The Bakweri people constitute the indigenous population, cohabiting with varieties of ethnic groups of both English and French expressions. Close to 30% of the over 2000 households in the Buea municipality are out-migrant households. Buea was chosen as the site for this study for two reasons; Firstly, the on-going crisis propagated by separatist groups creates huge security challenge that limits access to some communities within the region. Secondly, being a cosmopolitan city, we could easily identify out-migrant households from different socio-cultural and ethnic groups resident in the area. Many families, including out-migrant families have relocated from towns affected by the crisis to Buea, hence improving our access to a variety of household with out-migrant relatives.

Data was generated from semi-structured interviews with 97 purposively selected male-led and female-led out-migrant households in Buea, (68 male-led and 29 female-led out-migrant households, respectively) from February to August 2020. Male-led and female-led out-migrant households, in this context, refer to households with a male or female migrant, respectively. In the same wise, we describe out-migrant households as households in which one or more members (male or female) have migrated out of the country in search for greener pastures. Interviews were conducted with the wives of migrant husbands, husbands of migrant wives, and parents and siblings of male and female migrants. This was necessary to enable us understand the relationship between migration and transformation in gender relations, from the perspective of non-migrant household members. This approach to the study of migration and gender relations echoes Grasmuck & Pessar's (1991) view on the study of the gender and migration nexus. These authors argued that studies on gender and migration should, not only target migrants, but also take into cognisance those who remain behind in migrant households, as well as their relations with the migrant relative (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). The authors further note that resource mobilisation for migration as well as allocation of remittances in most case is a collective household decision as opposed to that of individual migrants. Both qualitative and quantitative data analyses as well as feminist frameworks were used to analyse and report data to determine how migration transforms gender roles, relations and hierarchies in male and female out-migrant households in the study community.

The Nexus of Gender, Feminism and Migration: Empirical Review:

Despite the overwhelming representation of women in migration flows, women's experiences were hardly captured in migration research. Instead the experiences of male migrants were generalised on both male and female migrants in most migration studies. The integration of gender in migration research only surfaced in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Nawyn, 2010; Mazumdar, 2003). Since then, the understanding of gender in migration studies have evolved from approaches that study gender based on the binary relationship between man and women to that which questions gender power relations in migration. Migration studies in the 1970s and 1980 equated gender with sex (Nawyn, 2010). This approach was championed mainly by feminist migration scholars who were concerned in understanding the interactions between migration studies and feminist/gender studies (Kofman, *et al*, 2000; Indra, 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000). As rightly documented by Hondagneu-Sotelo (2000), the growing interest

¹ The Republic of Cameroon consist of ten regions. Two of the ten regions (Northwest and Southwest regions) are English speaking owing to their British colonial history.

in the interconnectedness between gender and migration was, among other factors, driven by the radical transformation of feminism and migration processes in the late 1970s particularly in the United States of America. Unfortunately, the gender and migration nexus was seldom discussed in academic research and social movements. Feminism was ghettoized in migration studies while genders as a category of analysis hardly featured in the core of migration studies (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). For this reason, feminist migration scholars took interest in addressing the gender gaps in migration studies by integrating feminist and gender concerns in discussions and academic research on migrations, particularly international migration which has witnessed and unprecedented increase since the beginning of the 20th century. The first attempt at articulating the gender and migration linkage could be described as the 'women specific approach' to migration studies. This was driven by the need to increase the visibility of women in migration studies. This approach to the study of gender and migration was reflected in the works of Simon and Brettell (1988) as well as the 1984 special issue on international migration. Simon and Brettell, in the edited volume on 'International Migration: the Female Experience', captured women's experiences of international labour migration by interrogating the political, economic, social and familial factors that shape the experiences of female migrants (Simon & Brettell, 1988). The women centred approach made significant contributions in making visible the experiences of female migrants despite criticism from mainstream migration scholars such as Leeds (1976), who saw the use of women as a unit of analysis in migration studies as ideological rather than scientifically motivated.

The shift in emphasis from women as the unit analysis to gender, characterised the second phase of research on gender and migration. Gender in this context is understood as the system of relationships and power structures that influence roles, responsibilities, experiences and decision-making abilities of men and women, including migration decisions (Boyd, 1984; Houstoun *et al.* 1984; & Kossoudji & Ranney 1984). Morokvašić (1984) made an allusion to discrimination relating to gender, class and migrant status in analysing migration decisions and experiences. Based on Morokvašić's analysis, gender relations in the household intersects with variables such as class and migrant status in influencing men and women's abilities to make independent migration decisions as well as the post-migration experiences of men and women. The work of Sherri Grasmuck and Patricia Pessar is also worth mentioning here. In their book titled: *Between two islands: Dominican international migration*, Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) used ethnographic data to demonstrate how gender relations in the household, among other variables, explains individual migration decisions as well as the migration experiences of men and women. Hondagneu-Sotelo (2003) introduced a third dimension to gender and migration studies that focuses on the intersectionality of gender. Gender in this context is understood as a variable that intersects with a range of institutions, norms and practices associated with migration. Such an approach enables feminist migration scholars to understand the extent to which gendered institutions, and gender roles, relations and hierarchies are reconstituted and transformed as result of migration (Nawyn, 2010).

Gender, Feminism and Migration: Theoretical Framework:

Feminist theorising of gender and migration is a direct response to mainstream migration theories which many feminist migration scholars considered to be androcentric and male biased. Prior to feminist theorising, most migration studies were informed by the neo-classical economic theory, the structural theory, household theory and the network theory. Migration studies rooted in neo-classical economic theory see a strong positive relationship between migration and geographical differences in the demand and supply of labour (Lewis, 1954; Todaro, 1976; Haris & Todaro, 1970). Other factors, including gender are only secondary or subsidiary to economic factors in explaining the migration process. The structural theory on its part is rooted in the socialist school of thought. The structural theory of migration, strongly supported by the Egyptian social scholar, Samir Amin, sees migration as a direct consequence of economic exploitation of low income economies by rich developed economies. Amin (1974) further argues that migration significantly contribute to

the peripheralisation of the African continent within the global capitalist system. For the household theory of migration, the decision whether or not to migrate is determined by the household, and not the individual migrant (Jamie, 2012). Lastly, the network theory introduces a sociological dimension to migration studies. Based on this theory, people are likely to migrate when social, cultural and economic networks create opportunities for potential migrants to adapt to their new environment (Massey *et al.*, 1988). Such networks increase the likelihood for more people to migrate from sending countries, thereby creating a culture of migration in these communities (Jamie, 2012). The neo-classical, structural, household and network theories of migration provide great insights to the understanding of why people migrate as well as the consequences of migration, particularly on sending communities. Despite their relevance to the understanding of migration trends, feminist migration scholars find these theories wanting for their lack of responsiveness to the gendered factors that shape migration processes. Feminist theorising of gender and migration seeks to provide alternative explanations relating to why, how and under what conditions/circumstances men and women migrate, as well as migration's impacts on gender relations and hierarchies. Despite variations in approach to understanding gender issues/concerns in migration research, most studies of this nature are informed by Connell's (1987) gender relations theory. To feminist migration scholars, Connell's gender and power theory offers a gendered account of the migration experience of individual male and female migrants, as opposed to the gender blind approach to migrations analysis reflected in Neo-classical economics and Marxist political economic theories of migration.

Connell (1987) makes allusion to four dimensions of gender relations articulated as 'structural theory': emotional and sexual relations, economic and production relations, symbolic and cultural relations and organisational and power relations. Although not all migration scholars make use of gender relations analysis in understanding the gender and migration nexus most studies of this nature make use of some aspects of Connell's theory (Nawyn, 2010). Connell's theory constructs gender relations as social structure and draws largely from the concept of social structure articulated by Juliet Mitchel and Gayle Rubin (Mitchel, 1975, Rubin, 1975). According to Mitchel and Rubin, sex [and gender] inequalities are rooted in the institutions of kinship. Drawing from Claude Lévi-Strauss' definition of kinship as the exchange of women among a group of men (Lévi-Strauss, 1967), Mitchel (1975) further argues that the exchange of women is a major contributor to the subjection of women. Consequently the articulation of gender relations needs to be fashioned in line with an understanding of 'structural models' that generate sexual division of labour as well as 'structural inventories' that produces the gender order (Connell, 1987). The gender order (or gender regime) consist of three major elements: sexual division of labour (allocation of specific types of work to particular groups of people); (ii) the structure of power – social relations between individuals in society which may be equal or unequal, and (iii) cathexis - construction of social relations between individuals (Connell, 1987). These elements interacts with one another in social institutions and produces gender regimes that shape how men and women live their lives and interact with men in society (Nawyn, 2010; Kofman, 2014). Feminist migration scholars find Connell's theory an excellent entry point to the study of migration and transformations in gender relations. Using gender as a critical variable of analysis, feminist approach to migration studies provide a more holistic understanding of how gender intersects with economic, social and familial factors in shaping the migration experiences of male and female migrants.

Migration and Gender Relations in Africa: Gender relations, and its influence on gender division of labour, and rights to access and control of resources is increasingly being recognised as a significant determinant of the migration patterns of men and women. The social construction of gender ascribes to men and women specific roles, activities, behavioural traits, attitudes and capabilities. This largely determines the degree of freedom for men and women to make independent decisions about their lives, including migration decisions (Francis, 1995; Bouchoucha, 2014; Camlin *et al.*, 2013; Beguy *et al.*,

2010). Although women's mobility within and out of Africa has increased in the past three decades, studies on women's mobility in sub-Saharan Africa are relatively few (see for instance, Beguy *et al.*, 2010; Collinson, 2009; Collinson *et al.*, 2006, Camlin, *et al.*, 2013). Even then, in most of these studies, gender is understood more or less as biological sex (male and female). Such an approach to the study of gender in migration was evident in Collinson's 2009 study of age and sex profiles of migration. In his article titled "Age-sex profiles of migration: Who is a migrant", Collinson (2009), used biological sex as a dichotomous variable in determining the migration experiences of male and female children, and young adults in the INDEPTH network. Similarly, Beguy *et al.* (2010), included measures of biological sex in their studies on "Circular migration patterns and determinants of slum settlements in Nairobi".

Very few migration studies in Africa (and even globally) integrated rigorous gender analysis and theory in interrogating the migration behaviours of men and women. Bouchoucha's (2014) study on gender relations and migrant behaviour in Tunisia is worthy of mention. In a research report published by the Middle East Institute, Bouchoucha (2014) used gender (as opposed to sex) as an analytical category in analysing reasons for migration and migration probability for young men and women in Tunisia. Bouchoucha's study found that most females migrate for family reason - to join their spouses, while the search for employment explained the migration decisions of majority of young men in Tunisia. The study further revealed a higher migration probability for single than married women; this was not the case for men migrants. Bouchoucha's findings resonate with that of Camlin *et al.* (2014), who equally reported marriage as a limiting factor of women's migration, while marriage had no direct influence on men's migration. These studies, not only compare migratory behaviours of men and women, but equally highlight how the role of gender and traditional norms about marriage and family shapes the migration experience of women as a category. Nonetheless, studies on gender and migration in Africa highlight some interesting trends in sex differences in migration patterns and flows in the region (Camlin *et al.*, 2014; Bozzoli, 1991; Casale and Posel, 2002; Collinson *et al.*, 2009; Hunter, 2007). Contrary to the Tunisian experience where females (particularly married females) are most likely to migrate for family reasons, evidence from South Africa demonstrate a strong positive relation between women's labour force participation and female migration patterns and flows, while nuptial migration is experiencing a decline in most regions of the world (Camlin *et al.*, 2014; Casale & Posel, 2002). Increase access to education further improves economic migration opportunities for women (Adepoju, 1995; Jamie, 2008).

Collinson *et al.* (2009) also reported the significant role of female migrant remittances in sustaining poor households. This might have implications for transforming gender roles, relations and gender hierarchies in migrant households. A few studies have attempted to document how intra-household power relations are transformed as a result of migration (Bever, 2002). A gendered assessment of control over household income is a useful tool for analysis in intra-household gender relations in out-migrant households (Roldan, 1988). According to Bever (2002), migration is more likely to transform gender roles, although changes in gender ideology may not be evident. Drawing from the experiences of migrant and non-migrant households in Yucatan (Mexico), Bever (2002) observed transformation in gender roles in migrant households. However, traditional patriarchal gender ideologies continue to be upheld strongly by both men and women in migrant, just like non-migrant households. These findings may point to the suggestion that migration is more likely to result in the transformations of gender roles, gender division of labour, but, not necessarily on gender relations and hierarchies.

Profile and composition of out-migrant households in South West Cameroon: Data for this study was generated from semi-structured with 97 participants – 68 participants from male-led and 29 from female-led out-migrant households. In terms of sex and age of participants, 64% were males and 36% females, and most of them (95.4%) were within the active population age group of 24 – 45 years (Table 1). Results from the structured interview further revealed that

majority of the participants (72.3%) were university graduates; 57.4% were monogamously married as opposed to 21.9% single; 10.7% were engaged. In terms of economic opportunity, almost all the participants were involved in income generating activities such as civil service employment (25.7%), wage employment (49.6%) or petty businesses (21.2%). A greater proportion (63.8%) did not occupy any position within their households. Majority (63.9%) were heads of household, 25.5% were co-heads while 10.6% were ordinary household members.

Table 1. Composition of Migrant Households of the Study Sample

Variables	Category	Percent (%)
Sex	Female	36.0
	Male	64.0
Age	≤ 24 years	23.4
	25-30 years	40.4
	31-35 years	21.3
	36-40 years	10.6
	41-45 years	2.1
Marital status	≥ 51 years	2.1
	Married	67.4
	Engaged	10.7
Level of education	Single	21.9
	Secondary	12.8
	High school	12.8
	University	72.3
Household status before migration	Others	2.1
	Head	63.9
	Co-head	25.5
Economic activity	Ordinary household member	10.6
	Civil service employment	25.7
	Wage worker	49.6
	Petty business	21.2
	None	3.5

Data source: Generated by researcher from semi-structured interviews with 97 out-migrant households in South West Cameroon: Year

Gender Differences in Migration Trends : We observed a significant difference in the proportion of migrant category involved in out-migration between female and male out migrant households (Table 2). The data suggest that out-migration abroad is significantly more likely to be undertaken by husband (29.4%) and wives (17.2%) in married female and male out-migrants households respectively. This finding corroborates that of Camlin *et al.* (2014), Casale & Posel (2002), and Bouchoucha (2014) who equally observe a very weak association between nuptial relationship and women's migration, while female migration is more likely to increase in areas with decline in marital relationship.

Table 2. Out-migrant Household Relatives residing abroad

Relative living out of the country	Category of Migrant Household	
	Male out-migrant household n (%)	Female out-migrant households n (%)
Father	2 (2.9)	0(0)
Husband	20 (29.4)	0(0)
Wife	0 (0)	5(17.2)
Daughter	0(0)	23(79.3)
Son	42 (61.8)	0(0)
Others	4 (5.9)	1(3.5)
Total	68 (100)	29(100)

Data source: generated by researcher from semi-structured interviews with 97 out-migrant households in South West Cameroon: Year

Findings on sex disparities in migrations trends are in line with that of Bever (2002) depicting that out-migration rates are higher among men (68, 70.1%) than women (29, 29.9%). Bever (2002) observed similar trends in South Africa where men outnumber women in out-migration in the northern coast of KwaZulu-Natal. However, contrary to Bever (2002), we did not find any significant gender difference in migrant destinations. Over 95% of the out-migrants were residing in North America (USA and Canada) and Europe (UK, Belgium, Germany and Spain). Most migrants from Cameroon are economic migrants. This explains why North America and Western Europe are highly sought

for destinations for migrants. This explains why over 95% of the out-migrant households (male and female put together) reported that their relative(s) migrated in search for greener pastures in Europe and America. Asian countries offer opportunities for migrants who cannot secure visas to travel to Europe and North America. This was the case of a few out-migrant households in the sample, whose migrant relatives were residing in countries such as Japan, China, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and United Arab Emirates (UAE). This was reported by less 5% of the out-migrant households.

Gender and Household Migration Decision: Migration decisions, whether individual or collective has been a subject of contention between neo-classical micro-economic and new household economic theories. For the neo-classical micro-economic theory, migration decision is largely influenced by the individual rational actor (migrant) who understand what's best for their future and are motivated by the need to improve on their personal gains, in terms of economic opportunities or human capital development (Todaro, 1976; Massey et al, 1998). On the other hand, the new household economists such as Stark & Bloom (1985) and Fischer et al (1997) argue that the household is at the centre of migration decision-making. The decision whether or not to migrate is a collective household decision based on the common good of the household as opposed to that of the individual migrant. Connell (1987) introduced the gender dimension to household collective migration decision-making. Connell argues that the outcome of household migration decisions are strongly influenced by household gender relations that privilege certain household members over others in terms of who should migrate. Inspired by the above understandings we asked participants from male and female out-migrant households to respond to a couple of questions relating to gender and migration decision-making.

Firstly, we asked participants to tell us who made the decision for their relative to travel abroad. Our result complements the arguments by new household economist that migration decisions are collectively done by the household. This was reported by 62 (63.9%) of the participants from both male and female out-migrant households. However, in some cases, we observed that heads of households had greater influence in the outcome of household migration decisions. A participant from a male out-migrant household had this to say:

...“my brother [the migrant] brought the idea... he told my father that there was a ‘line’ [an opportunity] to travel to America. My father was worried that it could be scammers but later on he accepted and we started making preparations for him to travel...”

It was further revealed that household migration decisions favoured those who are more likely to provide economic support to the entire household in the form of remittances. This is supported by one of the participants still from a male out-migrant household who said:

“...I think he [the migrant] was the best person to go [travel abroad]. He is the eldest in the family and very hard working. He needed to go so that he can support the family...he has been doing a lot for our family...”

Similar trends were observed with female out-migrant households. Some of the qualitative responses we got from female out-migrant households include:

“...we decided she should go because she is motivated and very hard working, she also has the family at heart. We know that she will make it abroad and our family will be fine...”

“...she is the most intelligent in our family, my father sent her to Germany to further her studies and get a good job so that she can create opportunities for other family members to travel...”

Although the findings reveal that the outcome of household out migration decision-making favour members who can best provide economic support to their families, we noticed that qualified men were more preferred than qualified women in terms of who should migrate.

Husbands and sons were preferred over wives and daughters. This finding resonates with Connell's (1987) argument on the centrality of household gender relations in shaping household migration decisions. This likely explains why the study observed a greater likelihood for husbands than wives to migrate for economic reasons. The situation was however different when we considered sons and daughters as demonstrated in Table 2.

Secondly, participants were asked who provided the financial resources needed for their relative to travel out of the country in search for greener pastures. Here again, our findings support the argument advanced by new household economic theorists. We found that none of the migrants was responsible for funding their trips abroad in the entire 97 male and female out-migrant household. Based on the results, we noted that most of the households spent between 2,000,000 – 3,500,000 FCFA (approximately 2974-5206 USD) for migrants travelling to North American and Europe. Our results showed that in most of the cases, households (under the control of the household head) pull their resources together to assist the migrant family member travel and get settled in their receiving destination. Resources to support migration were generated through bank loans, loans from thrift and loan and/or sale of family property notably family land.

Migration and changing gender relations in out-migrant households: Migration and gender role transformation is central to gender and migration literature. Feminist migration scholars have paid particular interest in understanding how gender roles and relations change in a context where a male or female migrates. Literature highlights conflicting arguments among scholars on the relationship between migration and gender relations. They are those who argue that male-led migration expands the roles and responsibilities of non-migrant women, which may in turn empower women by improving on their status and position with the household (Balán, 1995, Hondagneu-sotelo, 1994, Hirsch, 2000). On the other hand feminist migration scholars like (Menjivar & Agadjanian, 2007) are of the opinion that male led migration increases women's roles and responsibility, but does not necessarily empower women or improve on their status within the household. In the case of female led migration, the general argument is that female migrants are more likely to enjoy greater empowerment and improvement in their status as they interact with different gender norms in their new context, as well as the ability to earn more income through integration into the labour market (Pessar, 2005; Morokvasic, 2007).

In line with the literature, our study investigated how gender roles and relations change in male-led and female-led out-migrant households. In line with (Balán, 1995, Hondagneu-sotelo, 1994, Hirsch, 2000) 65% women (wives in particular) in male-led out-migrant households reported that their household responsibilities increased since their husbands left. In addition to their traditional roles as wives and mothers, these women now have to assume responsibilities and obligations they did not have before. One of the participants had this to say

“... my husband used to drop and pick up our children from school...he used to attend PTA meetings and pay fees for our children. Now I do all that. All he needs to do is send us money...”

Another participant said “all the problems in my husband's family are now on my head. His family thinks he sends me a lot of money”. The observed changes in the roles and responsibilities were not associated with changes in status and decision-making power of non-migrant women. Most strategic decisions in male-led migrant households, such as decisions on children's' education, investment, and spending of household income were largely influenced by the male migrants. This supports Menjivar & Agadjanian's (2007) argument that male-led migration does not necessary transforms the status of women non-migrants in out-migrant households. The scenario was different in the case of female-led out migrant households because most of the female out-migrants in the households studied were young daughters, or other female extended family relative. The female migrants had assumed the

status of 'family bread winner', taking care of both their parents and siblings. These include both female migrants who are single and those living with their husbands abroad. Participants from over 90% of female-led out-migrant households look up to the female migrants for their educational and health needs. Our findings seem to agree with those of Cerrutti and Massey (2001) who observed similarities in the determinants of migration among young (unmarried) daughters, sons and fathers. Consequently, gender intersects with other variables like sex and marital status in shaping the migration behaviour of male and female migrants.

CONCLUSION

This paper reiterates the importance of gender in understanding migration trends as well as the behaviours of male and female migrants. Our main objective was to examine the changes in gender relations in out-migrant household in South West Cameroon resulting from male-led and female-led migration based on the experiences of non-migrant household members left behind. Migration in this context is driven solely by economic factors, while countries in North America and Europe are highly targeted destinations by potential migrants. Our findings lead us to the conclusion that while the traditional gender roles of non-migrant women are redefined due to male migration, this is not associated with transformations in power relations over household decision-making. Conversely, female-led migrants who are daughters tend to have more influence in household decision-making as they assume the new status of bread winners. Furthermore, whether or not to migrate is a collective household decision which is strongly influenced by its impact on collective household economic gains. Notwithstanding, gender intersects with patriarchy in shaping households migration decisions, privileging more males and single females, than married females as potential migrants.

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