Introduction: Parents' Involvement in Children's Lives in Africa

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A common phrase used when talking about child socialisation in Africa is that 'it takes a village to raise a child'. This phrase emanates from a context where a child is part of a larger network of people that extends beyond the nuclear and extended families to include members of the child's community. Such networks are possible in a relatively cohesive society found in rural communities where residential patterns are stable, local resources shared, and common descent claimed. These communities share a common language and social and ethical norms that govern daily interactions and practices. Needless to say, people in such communities know each other well. My own childhood memories of growing up in the early 1970s in a small rural community in Eastern Kenya are of my parents and grandparents being keenly interested and involved in my peers' school attendance and even reprimanding them for sneaking out of school to go to the local shopping centre during school hours. This attention was not only supported but also encouraged by the parents and relatives of those children, making it possible for an adult (not related to the child) to reprimand him/her when in the wrong and then report the incident to the child's parents who would in turn punish their child. I am sure this social practice is not limited to African societies but can be found in other societies where survival of a community is strongly dependent on, among other things, the role played by each member and private property ownership is not a highly developed phenomenon. Such a social arrangement would also thrive in a community with a worldview that embraces a collectivist, as opposed to an individualist, approach to life where one's individual aspirations are often suppressed for the sake of the goals of the larger community.

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With increased socioeconomic and political changes cutting across the continent as well as the increased urbanization of many of its countries, however, the socialisation of many children in Africa can no longer be undertaken in the same way that is expected to happen in the context of this proverbial village. African families and communities, just as it is in other societies, are constantly changing and readjusting to new ways of organizing social life in response to changes brought by local, regional, and global processes. Many of these changes have been as a result of national policies geared towards economic and socio-political development. Some of these development strategies have emphasized urban growth at the expense of agriculture and rural development leading to increased urbanization in Africa (Hope 1998) that has, to a great extent, been the catalyst for socio-cultural changes observable in the continent today. Improved health care and access to medication in many countries have also led to steady growth in population while higher levels of education and changing family structures have all shaped contemporary social relations in Africa. More and more Africans are moving to urban areas and more and more national policies are being defined by leaders whose experiences have been oriented by urban contexts. Now the question we ought to ask is 'what happens to the child when the village moves to or becomes the city'? For the most part cities, with their characteristic social patterns that promote individualistic, anonymous, and competitive patterns of living, are not conducive to any socialisation that allows for the full participation of community members in the private affairs of others. If anything cities can be important sites for challenging received normative principles regarding child socialisation. With continued correspondence and exchange between urban and rural areas, these challenges to social norms soon become societal and national practices. People become less and less wedded to the ideals of the small community (village) and prefer to have limited oversight from the community over their own individual lives.

Why this Special Issue?

This Special Issue of *Africa Development* brings together scholarship that speaks to the multifaceted roles played by parents in the lives of their children within the overall socialisation process specifically informed by these changing African realities. Cognizant of the fact that the raising of children and the position they occupy in society are to a great degree shaped by the relationships they have or do not have with parents, the papers in this volume have provided diverse examples of how parents' involvement or lack thereof in the lives of their children has been shaped by many factors. These scholars show that issues such as the changing social arrangements that have led to children having to choose between local economic activities or attend school,

youth and their parents trying to find a common ground through which to discuss matters of dating and sexuality, the motivation of children to attend and persist in school from observing their own parents enrol in adult literacy classes, and the reconfiguration of the traditional family make up when children independently sustain functional households, among others, all tell us a little more about child socialisation and help us understand not only the changing nature of African family relations but also its persistence and adaptability.

One major factor affecting parents' involvement in their children's lives is the reconfiguration of livelihood practices brought by modern economies and formal education. Now more than ever before, many parents are compelled to expend more time at work and away from home leaving them with few opportunities to spend meaningful time with their children. For many middle class families, for instance, work demands and lifestyle changes have led to childcare being relegated to house help, maids, or nannies, who not only attend to social and physical needs of children of their employers but also their educational ones including assistance with homework. In other cases, numerous children, who for various reasons have no parents immediately present in their lives, end up fending for themselves or are raised by non-filial caregivers. Many children also have access to information about modern life in ways that are not effectively controlled by their parents or the state. New technologies that have allowed for easier and wide access to cell phones, the Internet, FM radio, and cable television, have in some cases undermined the traditional roles parents and other adults in society play as sources of valuable information for individual and community survival and well-being. Critical life experiences gained by virtue of having lived longer than the youth are no longer what many communities call upon to solve their modern economic, social and political challenges.

These social changes have led to many studies of African families; seeing them as going through crises (Holborn and Eddy 2011; Ocholla-Ayayo 2000; Osirim 2003; and Weisner et al., 1997). Moreover, due to migrant labour, different economic and social arrangements, and changing structures of the family, other scholars have tried to explain the causes of the negative outcomes assumed to be emanating from contemporary family configurations in Africa. Questions such as why are there street children in urban areas, why are single parent families and divorce on the rise; why are more and more children using illicit drugs and engaging in premarital sex with multiple partners; and why are youth getting recruited into wars, have all led to different research questions and explanations. Recurrent themes such as women as household heads and the challenges their children face have been prevalent in many studies (Kossoudji and Mueller 1983; Kennedy

and Haddad 1994; and Monasch and Boerma 2004). Other scholars have argued that children whose fathers are absent from the households they grow up in tend to receive little or no support from their fathers (Richter 2004). Research by Madhavan, Townsend, and Garey (2005) carried out in Mpumulanga, South Africa, challenges this assumption, showing that children's co-residence with their fathers is neither an accurate nor a sufficient indicator of paternal financial support, that children are as likely to receive financial support from fathers who are not even members of the same household as from fathers with whom they are co-resident, and, that children who receive support from their fathers for any part of their lives are likely to receive support consistently throughout their lives. This kind of research that emphasizes social interactions or material transfers between households is important in expanding on what we know about parents' involvement in the lives of their children as well as in opening up opportunities to see such relations through a prism informed by African social realities rather than by assumed universal trends.

Challenging Common Assumptions about Child Socialisation

Contributions to this Special Issue offer theoretical perspectives and empirical insights (mostly based on field or survey research) that not only seek to respond to the challenges posed by new socioeconomic trends on the socialisation process but also look into the lives of children and youth in ways that open up their worlds and engage in issues that are not commonly expressed in scholarship about African youth and children. Cognizant of the fact that much research and scholarship on parents' role in the socialisation of children and youth in Africa have often tended to be shaped by values and interests emanating outside of the communities that are the focus of such scholarship, some of the contributions here provide research evidence that challenges such approaches. In her work on children heading households in the coastal region of Kenya, for instance, Bernadette Muyomi shows how these children lead autonomous lives that are stable and functional and that whenever they face challenges it is not due to their being children but because of hurdles set up by a system that only recognizes households headed by adults. She does this without minimizing the psycho-social challenges these children face. Moreover, work by Makusha, Richter, and Bhana challenges the assumption posited by many scholars about the key role played by resident fathers in their children's socialisation and wellbeing. Their research shows that not only is residency in a household not a good predictor of positive and extended financial and emotional support a father provides his children but also that in households where fathers are absent, other males are selected to take up a father figure role. They also show the need to expand on existing

methodological practices that have predominantly shaped studies of support provided to children by their fathers. Makusha, Richter, and Bhana argue for the value of gathering information from children, fathers, mothers, and other community members familiar with the child's support systems in order to understand a father's support of his children. Using such an approach themselves these scholars were able to establish that informal, local systems of family support exist that are used by men to support their children and that these support systems are often inaccessible to researchers who do not gather information from the affected fathers.

It is research such as this that allows us to see that while Western notions of childhood and the roles parents play or ought to play in the socialisation process have directly or indirectly shaped the way we think and write about childhood in Africa, African scholars have to continue to challenge these approaches through research that reframes these notions of childhood. Understanding such issues as child-parent relations, parenting styles, participation in paid or unpaid work, and certain definitions of childhood, within an African-centred and non-universalizing perspective will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the many socio-cultural practices associated with childhood in Africa today. If anything as has already been shown through anthropological research in Africa, scholars have to be cautious when trying to transpose cultural practices observed in other cultures onto African societies without carrying out in-depth studies of those African cultures themselves. Robert Levine's study of Gusii mothers of Kenya, for instance, shows that mothers speak to their infants mostly in commands and threats rather than in praises and interrogatives that have often been assumed (by most Western psychologists) to be important tools for raising emotionally stable children. These Gusii children grow up emotionally stable and become successful members of their communities just like their counterparts who are socialized in the 'normal' way (Levine 2004). Work among the Kpelle in Liberia and the Hadza in Tanzania have also challenged ideas about the assumed need for a prolonged period of socialisation deemed necessary for allowing children to acquire skills needed for basic survival. In the case of the Kpelle, Lancy's (1996) work shows that children require a very small inventory of skills to learn such chores as fetching water, pounding rice, caring for children, and washing clothes. Among the Hadza, Blurton-Jones, Hawkes, and O'Connell (1997) show that it does not take a long time for children to learn the skills necessary for foraging. Needles to say, African social practices cannot be fully understood if pursued through a set of tools developed for other societies. Even when it comes to studying practices such as Western education that has become a common presence in the lives of many Africans, the same kind of caution prevails.

Challenges Facing Parents in their Relations with Children

In many parts of Africa, Western-style schooling has continued to exert a powerful influence on the socialisation of children in ways that have far-reaching effects than the role played by parents. The school has now absorbed social norms and expectations that were once entirely part of parent-child socialisation experiences at the household level. Children now spend more time interacting with the school system than they do with their parents. Due to pressure to perform well in standardized tests, more and more students are spending even the time allocated for school breaks in school or in other instructional-related institutions of learning undergoing coaching and preparations to pass standardized national examinations. Even traditional peer and age-group systems that were utilized for inculcating values in children have been replaced by the school system, not to mention the learning or lack thereof that is mediated through such gadgets of modern technology as television, the Internet and cell phones. All these practices and avenues for providing information to children and youth continue to challenge and minimize the role played by parents in their children's socialisation. Moreover many children in Africa today return from school to an empty home because a parent or parents are away for different reasons. Such children spend long periods of time at home with little or no parental supervision. In situations where both parents are deceased or absent for all manner of reasons, these children take on the role of raising themselves and/or their siblings. Some of the papers in this volume have addressed this phenomenon and its negative effects on children's emotional, social, and economic wellbeing (see, for instance papers by Mildred Ekot, Paul Wabike, and Bernadette Muyomi). But there are other emerging issues regarding parents' involvement in their children's lives including challenges to assumed gender roles and social organisation.

As many African communities respond to and embrace various socio-cultural and economic changes affecting their societies, the idea that the care and teaching of young children is 'women's work' is no longer valid. Granted, women bear the bulk of childcare in most African societies but the number of fathers participating in the care of their children is growing and being encouraged as a result of personal preference, work arrangements, or egalitarian philosophies. More and more men are getting directly involved in the socialisation of their children and helping their wives with house work. Henry Kah's paper on urban residents in Cameroon in this volume as well as the work of African Fathers Initiative based in Zimbabwe (www.africanfathers.org) present a slice of these changing social and gender roles and identities of some men in mostly urban Africa. I have also mentioned that data regarding men's absence from their children's lives and the effects

that it has on children's social, emotional, and economic wellbeing, cannot be assumed to be universal but that even assumptions about residency for fathers in households and the effects it has on their children cannot go unchallenged. These studies will further expand our analysis and even our understanding of African households as well as men's roles in the socialisation and care-giving of their children. Admittedly, there is still a long way to go in this field of research but indications are that it is ripe for serious attention.

Studies of parents' relationships with children in Africa have not generated enough literature to form a corpus of scholarship that can be identified as a distinct area of study. Indeed, the few studies available on this topic are mainly focused on fatherhood and have mostly come out of Southern Africa (see, for instance, Madhavan et al., 2008 and Richter and Morrell 2006). Even studies of motherhood also focus on the biological function of giving birth than on the actual caring of a child (see, for instance, Keller et al., 1999 and Ringsted 2007). Alma Gottlieb's (2004) study of Beng infancy in Ivory Coast is an exception, outlining the specific activities that mothers carry out with their children during those early years when children are entirely dependent on their mothers for care. Indeed, Gottlieb discusses her own frustration with the US culture of child care where children are separated from parents for most of the time and shares her experience of using child rearing practices she learned from the Beng, such as carrying the baby for most of the time even when the mother is working, which she notes helped her crying son calm down significantly. When other studies talk of fatherhood, they primarily focus on the biological siring of children and the emergent reproductive health issues than on the socio-cultural relations fathers have with their child at the individual level (see, for instance, Bankole et al., 2004 and Magnani et al., 1995).

The bulk of the work on parents' relations to children in Africa has generally focused on families, going back more than four decades ago with the work of anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Today, as it was in the past, studies of African family structures have as much been a reflection of the prevailing perceptions of Africa and the family as they have been reflections of the social realities attendant in the populations studied. Assumptions about a better and more stable past, for instance, have led scholars and their interlocutors to bemoan the loss of the 'good old days' of the traditional African family where things were much better than they are today. Such studies have highlighted crises and challenges rather than adaptability and resilience in African families. In their edited volume titled *African Families and the Crisis of Social Change*, Weisner, Bradley, and Kilbride (1997: xxii) acknowledge that the crisis affecting the family is reflected in other areas of society such as the economy, ecology, politics, and development but that the threat to the stable African family is real.

A more recent work seeking to move beyond this focus on crisis is the volume edited by Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi, which shows that African families have had to make rapid adjustments in both structure and function to respond to 'increasing modernization, rising levels of urbanization and migration, as well as widespread strains hastened by economic restructuring and the HIV/AIDS pandemic' (2006: viii). They, however, note that the survival of the traditional African family as we know it is also greatly threatened. These kinds of adjustments to social and economic changes that contemporary African families have to make are nothing new in Africa, as shown by the work of Beatrice Whiting. In her study of Ngecha village in Kenya, Whiting notes that contemporary Kikuyu mothers value both traditional social behaviour (obedience, respect for elders, generosity, and good-heartedness) and modern social behaviour (cleverness, confidence, inquisitiveness, and boldness) and that these mothers are expecting their children to be able to adjust to new social contexts without losing valuable traits from their mothers' traditions (1966: 29-30). Such an approach that recognizes continuity and adjustment is a much more fruitful approach to understanding African families as well as parents' roles in socializing their children than one that seeks to draw lines between stable traditional families and modern ones in crisis.

Generally, the roles played by parents of either gender in any family or community are a result of socio-cultural expectations, personal preference, as well contextual factors such as income, occupation, and family size. Among the Kokwet of Western Kenya, for instance, childcare is the prerogative of mothers and other females in the household because 'Kokwet fathers conceptualize their roles as fathers first and foremost in economic terms' (Harkness and Super 1992: 203). These fathers emphasize such values as ability to follow instructions, going to school and listening to teachers, obeying their fathers, and coming home straight from school to help with chores as the markers of good children. The mark of a good father entails paying school fees for his children, providing economically for the family, and disciplining his children. This study reflects social realities in many other parts of Africa where gender-based social roles of parenting are still very much preferred even in increasingly changing social dynamics that tend to favour nuclear families especially in urban areas. In Nigeria, research by Olawoye et al., (2004: 10) shows that:

> Male children are actually shown by direct instruction and devolution of authority and responsibilities, how to act, think, and behave as a man. Women provide the theoretical instruction while men provide the practical example by their behaviour in the home and community.

In Cameroon, child care is not necessarily the work of mothers especially in families or households with multiple children of different ages. As Nsamenang (2001: 1) notes

> The traditional childcare role of the Cameroonian father is nonspecific and not routinized, whereas the mother's is to keep the home, perform other domestic tasks, and more importantly, to oversee and supervise sibling caregiving rather than provide direct childcare herself.

It is in this context of care giving by siblings and children imitating their parents that much socialisation takes place in many African households and communities.

In cases where work obligations separate one or both parents from their primary household, the socialisation of children tends to be either negatively or positively affected. Hunter's (2004) work, for instance, investigates the gap between physical paternity and social paternity and the role of Zulu fathers, pointing out that men's power in certain spheres, such as the abandonment of women they have impregnated, is linked to men's disempowerment in other spheres, notably economic. Hunter continues to note that men are enormously frustrated at being able to father children physically but unable to accept the social role that being a father entails because of inability to pay 'inhlawulo', 'ilobolo', and acting as a provider. This study clearly shows the close link between fatherhood and economic power and responsibility and how men without stable economic lives are often considered less 'manly'. This leads to 'ambiguous fatherhood', a situation in which manliness is partly boosted by being able to father children and yet depriving men of the role associated with fatherhood. It is not surprising that even South African law clearly identifies fatherhood in terms of economic provision than care giving (UN 2001).

Other works such as a book that grew out of a Fatherhood Project initiated in 2003 by the Child, Youth and Family Development Project at the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, (Richter and Morrell 2006) explore fatherhood more deeply, looking beyond the sheer biological aspect of being a father and into the complexities that shape fatherhood in different socioeconomic contexts. Contributors to this edited volume address numerous topics including historical perspectives on fatherhood, media and representation, the realities and challenges of being a father in contemporary South Africa, and local and international policies and programmes shaping and being shaped by fatherhood. In their introduction to the volume Richter and Morrell rightly note that, 'fatherhood is a social role. The importance of this role fluctuates over time and the context of the role shifts' (2006: 1). They also argue that fatherhood was put on the spotlight through such popular media avenues as the *BL!NK* Magazine that was launched in the

2000s in South Africa targeting upscale black men as well as the case of Lawrie Fraser who took his ex-partner to court for seeking to give up their son for adoption even though they were not married. Such sites that seek to construct non-traditional roles of fatherhood are showcasing some of the processes of change facing many contemporary African communities as they adapt to changing social contexts. Papers in this current Special Issue are in a sense providing further examples of these changing social contexts and how they affect cultural practices relating to socializing children and youth in contemporary Africa.

Contributions to this Special Issue

Contributions to this volume represent a small part of papers prepared for a special theme on the role of parents in the socialisation of children, as part of CODESRIA's Child and Youth Studies Programme. The call for papers encouraged submissions that focussed on three sub-themes: education, children who spend substantial amounts of time unsupervised (often referred to as latchkey children), and men in children's lives. Surprisingly, there were very few abstract submissions whose research focused on the everyday relations that parents have with their children, the kind of relations that require extended research and a cultivation of intimate relationships between researchers and research participants. As an anthropologist, I have come to admire and value this kind of research that is anchored in ethnography because it allows the researcher's conclusions to be informed by very specific on-the-ground practices and sensibilities that capture the pulse of a community or society. Luckily, in this volume, we have a number of researchers whose contributions have either been informed by a long-standing association with the data presented here through repeated research on the same topic in the same location or by a close personal relationship with the subject matter. All the eleven papers included here fall under three general categories reflecting the sub-themes suggested in the call for submissions mentioned earlier. These categories include, parents' involvement in their children's education including matters of sexuality (Agunbiade, Kunnuji, Anyikwa and Obidike, Amenyah, and Loomis and Akkari), men in children's lives (Kah, Thupayagale-Tshweagae, Mgutshini and Nkosi, and Makusha, Richter and Bhana), and children with little or no adult supervision for long periods of time (Ekot, Wabike, and Muyomi). I now highlight each of these contributions here below.

Parents' Involvement in their Children's Education

Ojo Melvin Agunbiade's research on dating relationships among adolescents in Nigeria and their parent's awareness of such activities provides an

interesting prism through which one can view changing relations between parents and their children, especially in an urban context. Agunbiade's study shows adolescents in the study straddling two competing spheres, one in which they want to maintain a close and open relationship with their parents, and another in which they consider such matters as sexual behaviour as private and outside of their parents' purview. These adolescents are constantly being confronted with cultural, religious, situational and self-imposed dilemmas that force them to negotiate boundaries between privacy and disclosure. Findings from the study show that gender and age were dominant factors in the disclosure and dating patterns of the adolescents with more females than males involved in dating, while older adolescents (aged 17–19) disclosing more about their dating relationships to peers than those between 14 and 16 years of age. The study further shows that when parents became suspicious of their children's dating activities, the children in turn distorted any information shared with their parents in an attempt to remain discreet in their activities as well as to maintain positive relations with their parents.

In a paper focusing on a similar topic, Michael Kunnuji explores the issue of parent-child communication on sexuality-related matters in Lagos, Nigeria, highlighting questions of gender differentials in parents' involvement in parent-child communication and in young people's involvement in parent-child communication. Using data from a survey of 1,120 youth in the city of Lagos, the study shows that mothers are more involved in discussing sexuality-related matters with their children than fathers, and where fathers are involved alone or in conjunction with mothers, the child is likely to be male. The study also shows that while parent-child communication may not prevent or reduce sexual activities among young people, it does not increase it either, but is significantly related to safe sex practices in the study population. In Both Ogunbiade and Kunnuji's work, we see sexuality as an area of interaction between parents and youth currently enrolled in a formal education system but who are not necessarily dealing with their sexuality from a specific educational perspective although the interaction is nonetheless educational.

Anyikwa and Obidike's paper titled 'Parental Involvement: How Mothers Construct their Roles in the Literacy Education of their Children' is an invitation to the reader to consider the 'hidden' role played by middle-class mothers in their children's literacy education. Using data from interviews and observations focused on ten mothers involved in their children's literacy education, the authors show invisible strategies that these mothers use as 'intellectual resources' in their children's literacy education. The findings show that traditional understandings of parental involvement may overlook

ways that middle-income parents deliberately involve themselves in their children's education, including high expectations of their children being successful in the future, monitoring what their children do in and outside of school, asking their children to complete their homework then grade and correct it, and providing distinct learning experiences such as pronunciation, spelling and meaning of words and sentences for their children in reading and writing. In a related study, Efua Amenyah's work in Togo on parents' engagement in adult literacy classes and their children's retention and performance in school, shows some of the ways in which parents can provide positive role modelling when they are themselves committed to schooling. In the study that gathered data from 132 adult learners and 20 volunteer teachers from ten different adult literacy classes in Togo, Amenyah shows that adults who are engaged in learning, and who perform and persevere while attending literacy classes, provide non-material incentives for their children's own education, constantly encouraging them to learn in order to perform better in school. The more their children see them committed to staying in school, the more motivated they are to persevere.

Still on the topic of parents' involvement in their children's education process, Colleen Loomis and Abdeljalil Akkari's paper on early childhood education in Madagascar addresses the challenges of taking parents' willingness to support their children's education and mobilizing it into participation in school activities and programmes. The paper focuses on parents' participation in early childhood education in Madagascar by placing it within an existing complex context of poverty, former colonialism, contemporary political instability, and international cooperation. Using data gathered in Anatanarivo, Sakaraha, Toliera, and Betioky, the authors show that there exists suspicion between the state and parents in general and that unless the school starts to affirm the value that parents bring to the school in enhancing early childhood education, children's learning will be negatively affected. There is also a need to go beyond the school and create opportunities for other actors in the education system (teachers, administrators, NGOs, and the government) to meaningfully value and engage parents' resources and create new ways for parent participation in the extractive model of schooling that is in place. Such a collaborative approach in early childhood education will be enhanced and advanced.

Men in Children's Lives

Henry Kam Kah's study of the changing nature of child care practices among urban Cameroonians shows how two parent families that have both the mother and father in economic activities that take up much of their time and keep them away from their home have led to a situation he regards as

'husbands stepping into their wives' shoes. As Kah argues, childcare has for a long time been the near exclusive responsibility of women and female house mates in Cameroon and other parts of Africa, but contemporary urban challenges have forced many of these women and house mates to engage in activities that limit their ability to fully devote time to child care. There is also a growing change in social attitudes among males that has led to a blurring of traditional gender roles, and as a result, some aspects of children's care have devolved to husbands or fathers. Kah's research challenges existing orthodoxies regarding gender roles by explaining new developments in childcare by fathers among urban residents in Cameroon, highlighting key factors that explain the increasing role men are playing in the caring of their children and the implications such practices have not only for household development but also for the society as a whole.

A substantial body of research has consistently concluded that children growing up with absentee fathers are at an increased risk of maladjustment, and co-parenting has an added benefit of modelling dyadic skills that include proving mutual emotional support, influence, and amicable resolution of disputes. Working from this position Gloria Thupayagale-Tshweneagae, Tennyson Mgutshini, and Zethu Zerish Nkosi in their paper titled 'Where is my Daddy? An Exploration of the Impact of Absentee Fathers on the Lives of Young People in Botswana', argue that co-parenting can have both direct and indirect or mediated effects on children. Through qualitative data obtained in 2009 from 45 final year students at the University of Botswana and a specific focus on personhood, the authors conclude that youth raised in father-absent families view their personhood as inferior, less guarded, and incomplete, relative to that of their counterparts who were born and raised in married-couple families. The paper concludes that living a full quality life eludes youth who were raised by mothers only, affirming the importance of fathers in the personhood of any individual.

In their paper titled 'Children's experiences of support they receive from men in the context of HIV/AIDS and poverty in rural KwaZulu-Natal as reported by men, women and children', Tawanda Makusha, Linda Richter and Deevia Bhana challenge studies of fathers' involvement in their children's support that tend to collect data through men's self-reports, women's appraisals, or children's accounts of men's involvement by using data from reports by children, women, and men. Using in-depth interviews conducted with twenty focal children, twenty female caregivers and sixteen fathers/ father-figures nominated by the children in twenty randomly selected households in KwaZulu-Natal, they established that while men are important in children's lives, it was not mandatory that those men be related to the

children in order to offer the kind of support children needed. These findings show the value of having males present in the lives of children, but challenge any assumptions that those men ought to be the children's fathers.

Children with Little or No Adult Supervision

In her research on children in low-income families in Uyo, Nigeria, Mildred Ekot addresses the various strategies used by parents of these (latchkey) children to help them deal with periods of unsupervised care. Her findings reveal that latchkey arrangements are common in the area, and include hiding the house key at the backyard or other places for children to gain entrance to the house after school, dropping the key in a neighbour's house or shop, opening the house door through a window, or giving duplicate keys to their children to take to school. Some of the respondents also reported that their children, though home alone after school, are closely monitored by neighbours and other relatives, while others reported having children remain home alone without any form of supervision until either parent returned home, before proceeding to hawk, or monitored by older siblings. While many studies address latchkey experiences in negative terms, Ekot's study presents some positive effects of latchkey experiences, including the children learning to be independent and responsible and of self reliance and competence in household chores, especially for girls.

In contexts where parents are too busy to be with their children at home as needed, other social arrangements emerge where local economic activities are more amenable for children than the promises offered by formal schooling, as Paul Wabike's paper argues. Focusing on parental involvement in their children's lives among fishing communities in Tanzania, Wabike shows that children in the fishing villages are faced with clear social dilemmas that mitigate any desire to spend time in school: the father fishes the whole night and sleeps during the day while the mother sleeps during the night and sells fish in one of the local markets or works on the land during the day. This cycle of activities often knows no weekends or public holidays and allows little room for contact between parents/guardians and children. As a result, many of these children are forced morally and emotionally to raise themselves or/and attach themselves to any other available authority. Often, these children do not attend any formal schooling which leads them to be labelled *watoro* (absent from school) or rebels. The reality of their lives is that while the formal education system demands that children of school-going age be at school, the fishing community's social organisation and labour market follows different patterns that do not really allow for optimal presence of parents to raise their children. Moreover, with few jobs available for school graduates, these children see no immediate value in formal education.

Bernadette Muyomi's paper that explores the psycho-social dynamics present in child-headed households on the Kenyan coast completes this batch of papers. The children she studied have either lost their parents, their parents are unable to be with the children for criminal offences they have committed or precipitated by other situations in the lives of their parents that force children to take up social roles that are usually reserved for adults. While children have rights just like adults, their well-being is compromised without parents' involvement in their lives because of missing parental obligations and interventions. Children in child-headed households are forced to handle responsibilities that are not appropriate for their developmental age, often denying them a sense of childhood comfort and burdening them emotionally, socially and psychologically. Such children end up with numerous psychosocial challenges, including low self esteem, early marriages, exposure to child labour, prostitution, trafficking and social exclusion among others. And yet, as the paper shows, the inevitability of child-headed households due to many socioeconomic and political factors has led these children to lead very independent lives that in a way challenges received wisdom about family structure and organization in Africa.

Concluding Remarks

These papers are a good start to an important journey into research on parents' involvement in their children's lives beyond the provision of basic needs for survival. With the breakdown of culturally-sanctioned institutions that inculcate important social and cultural values in children and youth as well as the diminished role of the nation-state as a legitimate agent for socializing youth (Diouf 2003), parents have a critical role to play in the lives of these important members of society. Despite the increased role that technology may play in the lives of children and youth in Africa and the possibility that such a role may compete with the one played by parents in socialization, the foundations for the positive social citizenry that children and youth receive from parents and other committed care givers is unparalleled. Social scientists have all along identified the family as an important social unit where cultural and economic reproduction is nurtured and contributions to this Special Issue point to some of these roles played by parents in different countries. Whether it is in the realm of education where parents follow keenly the progress and practices of their children in school, the struggles and determination for parents and their youth to engage in a healthy discussion on sexuality, or the challenges of maintaining one's work demands while attending to the needs of one's children, scholars are here showing the importance of a sustained presence of parents in the lives of their children to offer guidance and support as they both navigate a world that is always changing.

For scholarship to faithfully capture this dynamic of contemporary Africa, our researchers have to have their ears to the ground, constantly aware of the value of sustained research in their ears and topic in order to produce a deep understanding of the dynamics of the research issue. In order to compete with the demands placed on the lives of children and youth in Africa today and capture clearly their cultural and political ramifications, our research has to go beyond fly-by-night or dive-by data collection practices that cannot provide tangible interpretations of the complex lives of children and youth in Africa today. Scholars have to invest heavily in the work of truly understanding children and youth and providing interpretations and representations that address deeper questions that can reveal trends, project possible trajectories of practices, and anticipate outcomes. For starters, scholars have to do more listening to children and youth, do more reflection on the role their own subject position as researchers plays in shaping their research, and spend more time thinking about how their work can best represent the desires and realities of the populations they study.

Since most of us live and work in contexts where the lives and aspirations of children and youth are greatly represented every day, we may be able to circumvent the challenges of limited resources for research by focusing our inquiry on areas we have easy and sustained access to by virtue of our roles and obligations. Schools, religious institutions, families, and other social institutions where the lives of children and youth are played out regularly are good places to start such a research endeavour. Such an arrangement may open up doors for long-term research as well as deeper studies on one phenomenon in ways that surveys and questionnaires may not capture.

Research topics that will continue to need some focus in the coming years will be those that seek to understand relationships between children and youth on the one hand and parents, guardians, and other care givers on the other, in such contexts as the home, school, work spaces, and in interactions mediated through cell phones, social media and television. As some of the papers in this volume have shown, there is still a lot to be learned about the role played by men in the lives of children and more scholarship in this area is needed. More importantly, researchers have to continue paying attention to the politics of knowledge production and be vigilant against the seductive promises of using ready-made research instruments and approaches developed in other cultural contexts (mostly Western ones) especially in trying to understand the contemporary realities of African children and youth. While such research instruments have great value in certain research approaches, a critical assessment of their viability in specific research areas and topics ought to be applied constantly to avoid the pitfalls of universalizing human experiences and expressions that are often shaped by local realities that are not reproducible elsewhere.

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