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# In Pursuit of Development: Post-Migration Stressors among Kenyan Female Migrants in Austria

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**Abstract:** The emphasis on migration for development obscures its diverse challenges. The migration development nexus is paradoxical, problematic, and controversial. Remittances have long gained wide interest. Migrants' subjective experiences are important in understanding overall migration outcomes. International African female migration has increased and it is underexplored. This paper investigates the psychosocial stressors of migration based on the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria. A sample of 6 female migrants was selected. Narrative data were recorded and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. The findings showed that migration resulted in troubled relationships within the core and extended families. The economic dependency of family members in Kenya caused conflicts in interracial marriages. Acculturation led to alienation, family separation and isolation. Achieving economic goals proved challenging due to unpredictable effects in Austria. Failed expectations driven by stereotypes about Europe resulted in disillusionment and high expenses. Routine racism and Black female body objectification affected the mental health of the participants. This article contributes to knowledge on international African migration and gender-specific issues concerning African female migrants. The results will inform policymakers, academia, future migrants and mental health providers. Further research on the effects of migration on African migrants is recommended.



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## 1. Introduction

The potential for international migration to promote the economic development of origin and destination countries has been asserted in the literature (Kratzmann and Hartl 2019; Hagen-Zanker and Foresti 2018; Orozco and Hennebray 2017; Wodak and Rheindorf 2018; United Nation 2020). However, these optimistic assertions which are mainly linked to labour migration to developed nations and the resulting remittances are contentious. While objective gains of migration cannot be dismissed, the subjective experiences and wellbeing of migrants are significant in assessing the outcome of migration (Hendriks and Bartram 2019). Thus, a comprehensive outcome of migration considers the lived experiences and not only economic factors. Some scholars argue that migration optimism has overshadowed previous concerns of brain drain and that remittances have failed to achieve meaningful economic growth in developing countries (Geiger and Pécoud 2013; de Haas 2010; Appleyard 1989; Bakewell 2009). Because remittances meet basic consumption family needs (Bakewell 2009; Torres and Carte 2016; Maymon 2017), they are viewed as likely to promote dependency and inequalities as noted by Appleyard (1989).

Despite these perceived flaws, remittances have shown some positive effects and supersede official development aid (ODA) in Africa (Jena 2017; Bodomo 2014). In comparison to ODA that has been prone to misappropriation and external conditionalities, remittances are received directly by families as noted by Bodomo (2014). The direct mode of remitting allows for timely utilisation and prioritisation of the resources for family needs which would remain unmet despite ODA flows. Gonzalez-Garcia et al. (2016) note that "remittances constitute a major source of foreign exchange and income for several sub-Saharan

African economies, contribute to the alleviation of poverty and help reduce macroeconomic fluctuations” (Para. 42).

A study to determine how Kenyan households utilise remittances shows that remittances reduce poverty by improving the welfare of households and offering families opportunities to engage in productive ventures (Jena 2017). Data from another study done on Kenya by Misati et al. (2019) indicate the social and economic differences between households that receive remittances and those that do not. The authors note that remittances could be leveraged to promote financial inclusion and thus foster financial development. This can be achieved through accessing financial services and investing in human and physical capital to promote economic sustainability (Gonzalez-Garcia et al. 2016). However, remittances may not be sustainable because they depend on the political and economic development of destination countries. Moreover, the investment environment of the origin countries affects development outcomes since migration is driven by its underdevelopment (Geiger and Pécoud 2013). Thus, migration alone can neither foster development nor absolve developing nations from their responsibility to create an environment for economic development to thrive (de Haas 2010).

Migrants from developing nations aspire for a better life for themselves and their families in mainly economic terms. However, migration that is predicated on economic gain alone might not offer satisfaction even when the goal has been achieved as noted by Hendriks and Bartram (2019). The authors argue that subjective experiences are significant in showing how migration impacts individuals even when the goal of migration has been accomplished. Subjective experiences are also significant for migrants, prospective migrants and policy makers to promote migration management. Therefore, an overarching outcome of migration goes beyond the initial goal of migration. This study explores the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria. It broadens the knowledge on international African female migration and highlights the intersection of gender and race in migration.

## 2. Literature Review

The subjective experiences of migrants are an indispensable part of the migration phenomenon. In Europe, international migration has drawn controversies and negative attitudes toward refugees and migrants (Krotofil and Motak 2018; Wodak and Rheindorf 2018; Kratzmann and Hartl 2019). Particularly, international African migration has been described in disparaging and alarming terms. Collier (2013, p. 246) refers to an “African exodus” and “invasion,” while Myers (2005) gives alarming and overstated predictions of “environmental refugees” that will arrive on the shores of the Western world. In addition, Caldwell (2019) warns about a poor Africa that is destined to be infinitely dependent on the West due to population explosion. These stereotypical opinions have an impact on how natives in destination countries perceive Africans and their collective identity. African migration is not exceptional from other world regions and most Africans migrate within the continent (Flahaux and De Haas 2016).

Some authors have noted the dearth of literature on subjective experiences of international African migrants (Agadjanian 2008; Okeke-Ihejirika et al. 2020; Idemudia 2014; Kabuiku 2017). However, emerging literature indicates a change with the increase of international African migration to other regions besides the West such as the Gulf countries (Atong et al. 2018), China (Bodomo 2018, 2020). This literature review gives a summary of the subjective experiences of international African migrants.

### 2.1. Transnationalism and Social Support

Previous studies on Kenyan migrants in the United Kingdom (UK) show the importance of maintaining transnational identities for subjective well-being in host countries through financial support to families and chronically ill relatives in origin countries (Fesenmyer 2016; Taylor et al. 2012; Wangaruro 2011). In collective societies, supporting extended families has a cultural dimension as noted by Nwoye (2009). The author notes

that most African migrants have two families (homes): their own family in host countries and the extended one in origin countries which consists of several individuals and families. The responsibilities and loyalties accorded to these families can be financially burdening especially for those unemployed, in low-paying jobs, or without work authorisation. Due to the interdependence in collective cultures, African migrants tend to be torn between two worlds. Fesenmyer's (2016) study involving older Kenyan women in the UK indicates the contradictions and temporality of living in two worlds and making meaning of "home." Due to the responsibilities both in the diaspora and at home, the women postpone their return home indefinitely.

Sometimes migrants and their relatives experience conflicts amongst themselves, some of which are unresolved. However, social support is significant during the acculturative experience whether from relationships in origin or destination countries (Kabuiku 2017). The author observes that those without support experience loneliness and isolation. A sense of community and interdependence are significant African values (Mbiti 1969; Tutu 2013) that promote resilience among migrants and marginalised indigenous populations (Van Breda 2018; Tousignant and Sioui 2009). In particular, migrant African women with experience of conflict-related sexual violence benefit from social support and building trusted relationships as a coping method in their new settings and identities (Yohani and Okeke-Ihejirika 2018). Social support and religion are useful resources in coping with acculturative stress among Kenyans in the United States of America (USA) (Kabuiku 2017), which is not surprising because religion is a significant component of African cultures (Mbiti 1969).

## 2.2. Acculturative Stress

Migrants face culture shock due to differences in the language and culture of host communities as noted by Kabuiku's (2017) study of Kenyans in the USA. While language is necessary for integration, natives were critical of Kenyan migrants' English accent which led to poor self-confidence among Kenyans to whom English is an official language. Parenting styles and dress code differences are just some of the examples cited in the study which were a concern to Kenyan parents who feared the influence on their children. Similarly, Stewart et al. (2015) explored the challenges faced by new African parents in Canada due to shifting family roles, cultural barriers, differences in parenting, conflicts, loneliness, high costs of child-rearing which led to marital conflicts amidst discrimination. Because acculturation is a demanding and major life event, those who are unable to adapt psychologically risk developing mental health problems (Berry 1997).

Devaluation of professional achievements and education was a reality faced by most migrants according to Kabuiku (2017) and Nwoye (2009). Most migrants had to work in low-paying jobs shunned by the native population which was a downward movement. Similarly, Odera (2010) noted the negative influences of acculturative stress on the mental health of Kenyans in the USA due to the disillusionment associated with migration failures. While Kenyan migrants faced varied challenges, returning home was not an option due to the shame associated with migration failures which they perceived as worse (Kabuiku 2017).

Lack of social support in navigating a new and expensive health care system with long waiting periods, harsh weather, language barriers and cultural differences are among some of the subjective experiences of African migrants and refugees in Canada (Woodgate et al. 2017). Other studies reveal that African migrants experience depression and anxiety due to traumatic personal experiences, isolation, alienation, and sustained racism (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020; Bentley et al. 2012; Idemudia 2014). These studies affirm that subjective experiences impact migrant health, integration and their family relations including those in countries of origin (Torres and Carte 2016; Geiger and Pécoud 2013; Müller and Koch 2017). Similarly, Nwoye (2009) notes that the decision to migrate has implications for the extended family due to collective cultural contexts, family cohesion and interdependence.

### 2.3. Discrimination and Racism

The failure to integrate into the host society due to discrimination and adverse attitudes combined with insufficient information can restrict the full participation of migrants in destination countries (Hendriks and Bartram 2019). Studies show that migrants are denied due promotion at the workplace because of their minority status (Nwoye 2009; Kabuiku 2017). Some highly qualified migrants end up doing jobs that they would never do in their countries of origin. Both migrants with the legal right to work and those without were exploited and made to work under poor conditions.

In addition to the acculturative stress experienced by migrants in general, African migrants experience skin colour racism which aggravates their migration experiences, and impact their mental and physical health (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020; Zara 2017, 2018). African female migrants are predisposed to gendered and racially motivated human rights abuses and marginalisation. A study by Atong et al. (2018) on labour migration from Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda revealed serious human rights abuses including the murder of African women in the Gulf countries. Due to bilateral trade relations between some African countries and the Gulf states, there is a reluctance to address labour abuses (Malit and Youha 2016). Corruption within African governments also aids in facilitating illegal labour recruitment to the Middle East, despite the human rights abuses.

Finally, race is a predisposing factor for the sexual objectification of Black women as argued by Cheeseborough et al. (2020). The authors trace the objectification to the historical Jezebel stereotype of Black women as promiscuous which started with slavery and colonisation. The associated degradation of Black women as immoral and sexual objects is common in the West. Self-objectification due to skin colour rejection and racism leads to unhealthy behaviour and attitudes such as self-hatred and skin bleaching (Choma and Prusaczyk 2018; Van Hout and Wazaify 2021). Stereotypes of white and fair skin as the standard of feminine beauty lead to self-rejection, shame and mental health problems among African women. These racialised gender-specific issues affect African female migrants but remain underexplored. Thus, the costs of international migration can be very high for African women.

### 2.4. Insufficient Information

Most migrants base their migration decision on incomplete information about destination countries and are unaware of the consequences of their decisions which are often shaped by media stereotypes (Kabuiku 2017; Hendriks and Bartram 2019; Idemudia and Boehnke 2020). Frustration and losses are expected outcomes in such contexts. Some of the problems are aggravated by language barriers and a lack of knowledge of available relevant services in destination countries (Maymon 2017; Stewart et al. 2015). The misinformation leads to heightened acculturative stress among migrants and refugees.

Migration to the West is perceived in terms of gains and not losses which according to Nwoye (2009) is a false perception not based on reality which leads to disenchantment, disorientation, depression, guilt and regrets due to the harsh realities. Nwoye suggests a deconstruction of the stereotype that presents life in the West as easy and glamorous by uncovering its contrasts, contradictions and realities. This is not a simple task considering that most African migrants are unwilling to share their disillusionment with family members or peers in origin countries due to shame as noted by Kabuiku (2017).

### 2.5. International African Female Migration

Historically, female migration was associated with marriage or family reunions (Fleury 2016; Adepoju 2008). However, autonomous female migration has increased to include women from Africa (Adepoju 2011, 2008). In general, women migrate as care and domestic workers (Maymon 2017; Kwar 2004), for education, skilled work, or as undocumented migrants and refugees (Grotti et al. 2018; Fleury 2016). The majority of female migrants work in informal and low-paying jobs which deprive them of financial security (O'Neil et al. 2016; Maymon 2017) and predispose them to poverty in old age. Kagotho (2020) and Musangi (2017), writing from a Kenyan (African) perspective note that

culture impacts women's financial security because most customary laws exclude women from family inheritance. Although the Kenyan constitutional property law supersedes other laws in theory, in practice, it is not completely upheld due to women's lack of legal knowledge and access among other factors. In the migration context, women remit more than men (Hagen-Zanker and Foresti 2018), further depleting their resources and impacting generational wealth (Kagotho 2020).

Historical contexts are important in understanding global movements. There is a link between contemporary African migration to the slave trade and colonialism that is poorly understood (Adepoju 1998; Bertocchi 2016; Flahaux and De Haas 2016; Zlotnik 2004; Bakewell 2009). The immigration of 60-65 million Europeans to foreign lands (New world) from the 14th Century onwards is another noteworthy phenomenon in the history of migration. Although some returned back to Europe, "the mass migration represented an unparalleled population transfer that had profound effects on the global distribution of population, income and wealth" (Hatton and Williamson 1994, Para. 1). The expansionist agenda, its capitalist system, and its untethered extractive nature (Rodney 1973) formed inequalities and dependency (Lumumba 2018; Di John 2011), which fuels poverty that continues to trigger migration centuries later. The current global patterns of migration can only be understood from such a historical perspective (Adepoju 1998).

African female migration is driven by unemployment, conflicts, unstable politics, rapidly growing populations and environmental issues (Adepoju 2008). Some gender-specific push factors for African female migration are forced marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM) (O'Neil et al. 2016; Odera 2010). African women also migrate to pursue education, improve their lives, or reunite with family members (Kabuiku 2017; Flahaux and De Haas 2016). In recent times, African women migrate to fill domestic labour gaps in the gulf region (Atong et al. 2018). Female migration is associated with serious physical and mental health issues such as rape, violence, death, pregnancies, forced prostitution and slavery (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020; Grotti et al. 2018; Robila 2017; O'Neil et al. 2016). African women are particularly vulnerable to human trafficking (IOM 2019; Mafu 2019). Findings from a study by Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) show that African women involved in irregular migration undergo horrific experiences at all stages of migration: pre-migration, mid-migration and post-migration. These experiences lead to poor mental and physical health and acculturative problems in destination countries.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Berry's (1997) model of acculturation and the African concept of Ubuntu (Ogude 2018; Tutu 2013; Mbiti 1969) present a framework for understanding the data and findings in this paper. Redfield et al. (1936, p. 149) define acculturation as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups." These changes happen in the context of migration. Berry (1997, 2001), suggests a wide-ranging theoretical view of potential identity categories as follows: Integration, assimilation, marginalisation and separation. An individual who retains their own ethnic identity and also identifies with the new society is considered to be integrated. Assimilation occurs when individuals discard their ethnic identity and prefer only routine interaction with the new culture. Separation defines persons who identify only with their cultural identity and avoid interaction with the new culture. An individual with a marginalised identity fails to identify with any of the categories due to exclusion or discrimination mainly by the dominant group.

Berry recognises the role of the host society in the determination of the categories that the migrants find themselves in. The outcome is linked to the attitudes and national policies that may or not support integration in host societies as corroborated by Phinney et al. (2001). Berry notes that migrants "whose physical features set them apart from the society of settlement (e.g., Koreans in Canada, or Turks in Germany) may experience prejudice and discrimination, and thus be reluctant to pursue assimilation" (p. 11). The prejudice

based on outward differences affirm [Byrne's \(1969\)](#) similarity-attraction hypothesis which suggests that individuals prefer to interact at all human levels with those who are similar to them. While Berry does not mention Black migrants in the examples above, skin colour difference is a remarkable factor that has been historically used to segregate Blacks (see [DeGruy 2017](#); [Rodney 1973](#); [Onwuachi-Willig 2016](#)), making marginalisation the likely category for the group. The colour factor has implications for this study in understanding how Kenyan female migrants in Austria navigate their identity choices in the process of acculturation in a dominant European society in which ([Collett 2015](#); [Horvath et al. 2017](#); [Krotofil and Motak 2018](#)) migration remains a highly contested and politically divisive issue. The integration identity has emerged as the best mode of acculturation for its promotion of multiculturalism and psychological wellbeing among migrants ([Berry 1997](#); [Phinney et al. 2001](#)).

The African concept of Ubuntu is useful in theorising African migrants in their quest for interdependence, transnationalism and social support. Ubuntu embodies morality, humaneness, compassion, care, understanding and empathy ([Tutu 2013](#); [Ogude 2018](#)). The concept emphasizes that one's humanity is only defined through interaction with others and interdependency through participation in relationships ([Tutu 2013](#); [Mbiti 1969](#)). This collective interdependence is highly valued and demonstrated by African migrants through remittances to maintain transnationalism and social support.

#### 4. Present Study

This qualitative study is part of a larger completed academic project which investigated the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria. Several themes emerged from the main project. This paper focuses on the perceived failures and costs to the participants as a consequence of their migration decisions.

#### 5. Methods

The main study aimed at answering the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria?
2. What are the coping strategies of Kenyan female migrants in Austria in dealing with acculturative stress?

##### 5.1. Participants

The study participants were six Kenyan female migrants living in Austria. A total of 7 women were interviewed, but only 6 interviews were selected for the study due to an ethical dilemma about one of the participants. The sample size was sufficient to reach saturation and was within the accepted number for a qualitative study ([Creswell 2007](#)), especially one that uses an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) due to in-depth interviews and thick descriptions ([Smith and Osborn 2007](#)). Though the sample was small, it represented a homogenous group, an aspect that is considered sufficient in reaching saturation ([Guest et al. 2006](#)). The participants were considered to be subject matter experts.

The age range of the participants was between 25–55 and their duration of stay in Austria was between 4–30 years. The group comprised of single, married and widowed women. All the participants resided in Vienna, although it was not a requirement for participation in the study. The participants were all born in Kenya. The women came from different major ethnic groups to reflect the multi-ethnic Kenyan society. All the participants had completed secondary education in Kenya except one who had arrived in Austria as a minor. All participants had undergone some specialised training and were employed except one. Two of the participants were highly qualified.

##### 5.2. Sample and Procedure

The researcher contacted some Kenyan women known to her via telephone and explained the purpose of the study and the relevant information needed to make a participation decision. Out of the ten women that were contacted, three agreed to participate.

Those who refused to participate or expressed uncertainty cited confidentiality and unwillingness to share personal experiences. On suggestion from a contact who was not willing to participate, the researcher attended an event where some Kenyans were present. Several potential participants at the event made promises to participate but only two took part in the study after several follow up calls. One participant withdrew from the study after a preliminary discussion in which the researcher had obtained some data but had not yet acquired the written consent for the official data collection. The data were not used in the study for ethical reasons. One of the participants referred the researcher to two other women who agreed to participate in the study.

The sampling was purposive: (a) female and adult, (b) Kenyan born, (c) one-year minimum residency in Austria, (d) varied marital status and age, (e) varied ethnicity. Follow-up calls were made to secure data collection appointments. There were no payments offered or promised to the participants, nor did the participants request any. All participants signed informed consent forms and returned them. The study obtained ethical approval from the Sigmund Freud University Ethics Commission.

### 5.3. Data Collection

The author collected the data on an Olympus VN-732PC digital voice recorder and transcribed them using Express Scribe Transcription software. The study utilized the narrative interviewing technique. The method is suitable for collecting biographical data and allows people to give vivid accounts of their lived experiences using their preferred terms to enable the researcher to understand their experiences (Anderson and Kirkpatrick 2016). The approach enabled the participants to be experiential experts on the study phenomenon through the narration (Smith and Osborn 2007). There were no prepared questions except the initial generative statement at the start of the interview. I began the interviews by using the following statements: “Tell me about your life in Austria, I am interested in how you came here and everything that has happened that is important to you and your family.” I informed the participants that I would be taking notes for later clarification. After each interview, I clarified issues in my research notes to deepen the narratives.

The interviews were conducted in English, but the researcher and the participants shared a common language (Swahili), an aspect that created trust and affinity between them. Only one of the participants who came to Austria as a minor could not speak Swahili. A common language helps in understanding the participants’ narratives (Fleming 2018). In this study, knowledge of Swahili enabled the researcher to understand the Swahili interjections and other similar words that were uttered during the narration. The interviews were conducted within six months from June–December 2017. Data collection took place at various locations in Vienna and lasted for 40–90 min for each interview. Three of the interviews took place at the participants’ homes, two at a public venue and one at a workplace. Data collection for one participant was postponed due to interruption at the venue. A new appointment and venue were agreed upon. I took notes during the recording and followed up with the participants for clarity. Transcribed data were saved and secured with a password.

### 5.4. Data Analysis

The study utilized the IPA method to analyse the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria. IPA is suitable for in-depth interpretation of individual lived experiences (Smith et al. 2009) using a small purposive sample (Smith and Osborn 2007) and for exploring topics in psychology and phenomena such as migration (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

Data were prepared for analysis by transcribing the interviews using Express Scribe Transcription software. To ensure anonymity, the transcribed data were saved numerically according to the order of the interview (interviews 1, 2, 3, etc.). These were printed out with spaced margins to allow for the insertion of notes during analysis as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2007). The transcribed interviews were later saved under Swahili pseudonyms derived from different virtues and randomly assigned. The pseudonyms bore

no relevance to the participants' narrative, ethnicity, appearance or other personal characteristics. Using aliases or pseudonyms for participants or places to protect their identity is good practice in qualitative research (Creswell 2014). The pseudonyms were deemed more suitable than numerals to give each narrative a personal identity. The pseudonyms selected were as follows: Amani (Peace), Karimu (Kindness), Busara (Wisdom), Baraka (Blessing), Tumaini (Hope) and Neema (Grace). To ensure participant privacy and confidentiality, personal details (name, age, date of birth, career, employer, and village of origin) were deleted from the transcribed interviews. Transcribed data were secured with a password.

Preliminary data analysis entailed listening to the recordings several times to get new insights and ensure the transcription correctness. The author read the transcribed data and took notes on the margins of every transcript using a different ink colour from the text to highlight emerging thoughts and ideas. A different colour was used for emerging themes and convergent ones. Field notes taken during the recording were included in the transcripts since they contained relevant observations and explanations. Field notes enhance the understanding of the phenomenon through observation of nonverbal behaviours and environmental settings not typically captured in the recording (Sutton and Austin 2015).

## 6. Results

As already mentioned, the goal of the main project from which this paper was created was to investigate the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria. Several themes were identified but only one of the themes will be discussed in this paper. The theme is "The costs, regrets, and risks of migration." The participants' decisions to migrate had psychological, economic, social-cultural and interpersonal implications among other factors. The results of the theme's investigation are reported under four areas: troubled relationships, unfulfilled dreams, cultural conflicts and racism.

### 6.1. Troubled Relationships

To facilitate the relocation, some participants and their families made difficult choices that had significant negative effects on familial relationships. For example, Fadhila and her sister were adopted when both were under seven years by a stepsister who had obtained Austrian citizenship. The result was a total breakdown of relationships as Fadhila stated:

I broke contact with my half-sister and my other sister too. Also, that my other sister broke contact with my half-sister. We still live in the same city, but we don't really talk. I feel like our half-sister did a lot of damage to me and my sister because we always learn more to fight against each other. We experienced very bad things with our half-sister ( . . . ).

Migration resulted in estrangement in diverse social relations. Fadhila felt estranged from her biological parents. The early separation impaired parental bonding:

I wish I could have this with my real parents ( . . . ). I wish I could have the same relationship as other children, call my mother every day.

Migration separates individuals from their families and familiar environment. For Fadhila, it was a sorrowful experience:

My parents were crying so hard, but they said it was good for our half-sister to help us. When we visited home, we didn't want to go back to Austria ( . . . ) our half-sister was shouting and threatened to tear our passports (Fadhila).

Tumaini spoke about the estrangement from her peers in Kenya when she had given up and wanted to return home:

I actually thought of going home during that point. And I tried contacting people at home that I knew before I came to Europe and people had really changed. Nobody wanted to be associated with somebody who had been in Europe and didn't make to stay there. So, you are in this dilemma: Ok, so in case, I do not get the papers, so what do I do now?

Migration impacted close relationships at home due to ingrained perceptions about Europe that fuelled high expectations and competition:

My mother was really mad at me. She could not understand why others have managed in Europe to come and build a house and build a comfortable life at home (Tumaini).

We have not been able to maybe say we have made progress as our peers at home with lots of property (Karimu).

The high expectations created tension and threatened family cohesion as Karimu stated:

The people at home were still expecting support from us. They could not understand. The people at home were like, "She is making our son not to send us any money. She is now controlling him."

Financial support to family members in Kenya caused distress and misunderstanding in Amani's interracial marriage. Her Austrian husband and his mother complained about her spending money on the extended family, even when Amani's aging mother needed a surgical operation. Her mother-in-law remarked that "Africans liked sending money home."

## 6.2. Unfulfilled Dreams

The participants also had high expectations about Europe that resulted in disenchantment and regrets as Karimu explained:

I was blaming myself for dragging my children into my failed dreams. I would call my friends or write to my former workmates in Kenya, they would tell me, "Oh we are doing this, we are doing that" and I thought, "What a waste of life! What really made me do this? What kind of a mistake was this?"

Karimu spoke about her failed migration goals as follows:

I expected by this time to have made lots of money. By this time, I expected to have tracts of land, to have invested, I expected to have an NGO by this time, I expected to have done great things.

Participants who held good jobs in Kenya experienced loss and retrogression. Deskilling was inevitable for those who despite being well educated were employed in lower-skilled jobs:

I was a lecturer in Kenya. I came to Austria as an Au pair (Baraka).

I was not trained for that position. This was also another hard, hard hill for me to climb (Karimu).

Karimu's children reminded her of the family's economic degradation since moving to Austria:

One of my sons asked me, "Mummy you mean we were rich in Kenya?" and I said "What do you mean?" and he said, "But on Sundays, we would go after church, we would drive to town, go out to hotels, have meals, go swimming, we bought newspapers every day, you were driving your own car, daddy had his own car, we had a big house with a compound." It really broke my heart; it really broke my heart.

The disillusionment had an impact on Karimu's mental health and marriage:

My children were also suffering (..), they were seeing the difference, they noticed, and I cried a lot, I cried. I went into a depression ( . . . ) it was really a bad time. It was not good for my health even for my relationship with my husband. Then my mother passed away, and I sank into another kind of depression.

The relocation to Austria was a disruption for children's education considering the different school systems in Kenya and Austria:

When the children came here, they had already gone backward in education for one year. They had lost one year (Karimu).

### 6.3. Cultural Conflicts

Integration and acculturation were very challenging for parents and children:

Now the kids because of the influence, I don't know what and our lack of understanding of the education system. I mean we kind of started losing them, it was too much for us, we were not able to catch up, to cope, to understand. I mean we were like illiterate parents, who didn't know anything that is happening to the children (Karimu).

Due to the challenges, Karimu and her husband made a drastic and costly decision to salvage their children from "getting lost" and return them to Kenya:

We decided that the children have to go back home. We wanted them not to feel bad, so we took them to very expensive schools. It was really, really expensive. It was a time of being separated.

Faith was instrumental in providing hope, peace and safety when separated from loved ones. Moreover, the difficulties were perceived as having a divine purpose:

You know, I think certain things bring you close to God, so we prayed a lot. We trusted God to watch over them.

Loss of cultural identity, sense of belonging and associated conflict was a reality that confronted some participants as Fadhila demonstrated:

I am confused because I don't know; here I'm a stranger and there (Kenya) I am a stranger because I don't speak the language. I don't have the feeling for the culture there because I never learnt to have these feelings.

Similarly, Neema experienced a cultural conflict whereby "one is forced by circumstances to imitate the European culture" and at the same time "taking the African culture."

### 6.4. Racism

Racism impacted the participants' psychological wellbeing and hindered a healthy integration into Austrian society. Baraka narrated about a Vienna bus driver who remarked that "Africans are here just to give birth" when she entered with a baby stroller.

Despite the uncomfortable encounter, Baraka believed her relocation to Austria had a spiritual dimension:

I know that actually I'm here for a purpose, mostly because of the word of the Lord, which is my everything, yes, the word of the Lord, so I know that I'm here for a purpose.

Similar incidences of racial hostility led to a loss of sense of self-esteem, identity, and confidence as explained by Fadhila:

It was very disturbing and when I was alone, I was thinking about it and saying, "I hate my skin colour. Why can't I look like them?" I was always praying to God, "why can't you change my skin colour."

Tumaini was confronted by an Austrian man with a degrading racial stereotype that associates Black women with prostitution, thus robbing her of self-esteem and dignity:

And he was like "Yeah, how much do you charge?" And I am looking at him wondering what is happening here. I am just waiting for my train.

Due to racism, the participants struggled to find a sense of belonging in society. Migration exposed the participants to skin colour prejudices that were not obvious in Kenya:

You are rejected in many places, and you are not accepted and the racism. I was heartbroken because I was thinking that I would be accepted. I found people who didn't accept me (Neema).

Neema lost her marital home through a court order after her white husband's death. She perceived the decision as racist and unjust:

They said, "Now you have to get out of the house." When it comes to justice, when you are a foreigner, especially when you are black, you have no chance here. No chance! especially when it's a white and a Black. They just listen to the whites and take only what the white one is saying.

When faced with grief, severe material loss and perceived racial injustice, Neema resorted to her faith:

What helped me very much not to break down, after all what I went through first was my faith. It played a part.

## 7. Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of Kenyan female migrants in Austria and to explore their coping strategies in dealing with acculturative stress. This section discusses the results, limitations, recommendations for future research and conclusions. The discussion also illustrates the connection of the findings to the existing literature.

The Kenyan society is collective and family relationships and interdependence are significant values (Mbiti 1969). Therefore, a breakdown of significant relationships is a major setback for individuals and their families. For migrants, estrangement from family members in home countries intensifies the isolation, rejection and loneliness of life abroad (Torres and Carte 2016). Migration decisions impact families in diverse ways and could trigger misunderstanding and conflicts as seen in Fadhila's case in this study. Her parents' decision for Fadhila and her sister to be adopted by a half-sibling triggered decades of bitterness and hindered the resolution of family conflicts. Fadhila spoke about "breaking contacts with her sister and stepsister and learning only how to fight each other." The dreams of a better life for Fadhila and her sister led their parents to make the adoption decision. The parents believed that their elder daughter who lived in Austria was financially thriving and suitable to take care of her step-siblings. It was a costly decision that affected the entire family system and alienated Fadhila and her sister from her core family besides the childhood trauma. The early separation impaired parental bonding and left Fadhila wishing "she could be like other children who talk to their parents daily." The extent to which Fadhila's parents' lack of formal education, their economic dependency on their Austrian-based daughter and polygamy played a role in the adoption decision is noteworthy. These factors impacted the family's ability to deal with the conflict as well as the distant locations of the family members. Such conflicts could have far-reaching consequences for future generations who are born into a fragmented system that isolates them from extended family members.

Interdependency in family relationships has a social and economic dimension. Migrants in the diaspora take financial responsibility toward parents, siblings and other extended family members seriously (Bakewell 2009; Wangaruro 2011; Nwoye 2009). In this study, the participants' migration goal was to financially improve their lives and families. However, the inability of the participants to support dependents at home due to financial challenges abroad was met with a total lack of understanding and defiance by extended families, causing a rift in relationships. On the one hand, economic hardship in the diaspora was inconceivable for families at home. On the other, the economic dependency of extended families impacted interracial marriages and was met with stiff resistance by the Austrian spouse of one participant (Amani). The dependency of his Kenyan spouse's family was an invasion of core family boundaries notwithstanding that the spouse had migrated for self-improvement which in most cases includes the extended family. Coming from an

individualistic society with a well-functioning social security system, the Austrian spouse struggled to relate to the realities of his migrant wife's unequal background. His focus was on the nuclear family and the preservation of generational wealth.

The cultural divide between collectivism and individualism was evident within Amani's interracial marriage. Amani's husband rejected his migrant spouse's collective values by challenging the social and economic dependency of her extended family. The inhibition of core cultural values could lead to deterioration of spousal relations as demonstrated by Amani's case. While dependency might seem to be one-sided, economically dependent family members usually reciprocate in non-monetary ways, especially by providing a sense of belonging and collective identity for isolated relatives abroad. Van Breda (2018) and Tousignant and Sioui (2009) have asserted the importance of interdependency in relationships to promote resilience. Maintaining transnational identities was one way of coping with acculturative stress (Wangaruro 2011) and reliving the Ubuntu spirit of interdependency and interaction (Tutu 2013; Ogude 2018).

A noteworthy issue in economic dependency is the depletion of generational wealth and the sustenance of generational poverty usually evident in African communities (Kagotho 2020). Being African and female predisposed the participants to economic hardship due to the financial responsibility to families in Kenya, cultural exclusions on inheritance, gender pay gaps and racial prejudices. These factors hamper the investment opportunities and impact the social security of female migrants. Therefore, the disillusionment of the participants and the stigma attached to failed economic aspirations abroad are plausible and justifiable.

The participants in this study experienced separation, pain, regret, loss and psychological suffering in Austria. Leaving one's familiar environment to move to an unknown place for whatever reasons is a courageous and overwhelming decision with unpredictable outcomes. Migration produces fear of the unknown by separating an individual from the familiar and that is a foundational "loss" in itself. While a smooth migration transition might be impossible, relevant knowledge of the destination country may alleviate some of the shocks experienced by the participants and their families (Hendriks and Bartram 2019). For example, Karimu's underaged children who had severe problems adjusting in Austria were returned to Kenya. The separation caused great family anxiety and high unexpected expenses for their education and maintenance. The projected family reunion and development agenda was disrupted by the changes. Torres and Carte (2016), note that children left behind while parents migrate encounter several adjustment problems due to the separation. In Karimu's case, the children experienced problems adjusting due to acculturative barriers (Berry 1997) and Karimu's deteriorating psychological wellbeing. Karimu's faith in God was a resource during her trying time. She believed God would "take care of them" in Kenya where she felt they were safer. Religion is a significant component of the African cultures (Mbiti 1969). In addition to her faith, sending the children back home and talking to her mother often also helped her to cope with the disillusionment and depression.

Success in the Kenyan diaspora seemed to be measured in material terms by both participants and their families at home with property ownership as the only proof. The resulting pressure triggered enormous stress, competition and comparison with their peers at home and in the diaspora. This dominant view is related to the optimism of migration for development as mentioned in the introduction. The study showed that the emphasis on material wealth over social capital discourages diaspora permanent return and promotes secrecy and silence in suffering. Parents in Kenya whose children were students in Austria still expected them to purchase properties and compete with their peers abroad who had made remarkable investments. Stereotypes about an easy and glowing life in Europe contribute to ignorance at home about the realities of life abroad (Kabuiku 2017). These stereotypes can hide realities such as unemployment and low earnings against the high cost of living abroad to which the migrants are not exempted.

Being flexible and adaptable is important for migrants in navigating their new environment and culture for which there is usually no preparation. Coming from collective African cultures to individualistic European societies proved challenging to the participants and

their families. They felt lonely, isolated and most went through despair. This is consistent with Berry's (1997) acculturation theory which suggests that the acculturation process is a demanding and major life event that requires strategic ways of coping. The German language was a major barrier that isolated the participants from education, labour and social integration (Wodak and Rheindorf 2018). Culture shock (Kabuiku 2017) threatened family cohesiveness and children were said to be "getting lost" in the new culture. For example, although Karimu and her husband were highly educated, they felt like "illiterate parents" before their children, new teachers and a new system of education, culture and language.

Ideally, language preparation as a pre-departure measure would ease acculturative stress. However, most migrants lack the resources to pay for language classes which are very expensive at home and in destination countries. Although language fosters integration, it is also alienating because it is a carrier of culture and identity. For the participants, the alienation was heightened by their colonial background which initiated the marginalisation of indigenous tongues. The acquisition of the German language though necessary promoted further alienation from cultural identity and indigenous languages. It is not surprising that Fadhila felt "confused" and a "stranger" both in Austria and Kenya because she could not speak her indigenous tongue. Lack of acquisition of mother tongue or a national language such as Swahili in the case of Kenyans is an often-overlooked downside of migration which affects diaspora families.

Finally, participants experienced routine skin colour racism, a practice that is fuelled by stereotypes and is widespread in Austria (Zara 2017, 2018). The racialised stereotype of Black women as promiscuous and sexual objects impacted the participants' mental health by insulting their collective and self-dignity. Tumaini's experience at the train station where a white man asked her "how much do you charge?" reflected how the Black women's bodies are perceived in Austrian society. Although Tumaini was waiting for the train amongst other female passengers, being Black made her vulnerable to humiliation by a stranger. The assumption that Tumaini was a prostitute shows how race impacts the possibility of being sexually objectified and it is consistent with the historical Jezebel stereotype of Black women as seductive and immoral (Cheeseborough et al. 2020). The degrading experience led to a loss of self-esteem and a sense of insecurity. Berry (1997) notes that migrants perceived as physically different are predisposed to prejudice and discrimination. These adverse attitudes impact mental health and a healthy acculturation process.

Another dimension of the objectification of the Black female body is its perception as a "birth machine" that is out of control. Baraka narrated about a Vienna bus driver who remarked that "Africans are here just to give birth" when she entered with a baby stroller. The racially motivated remark was also marginalising (Berry 1997). The bus driver insulted Baraka's sense of collective identity which she needed to endure such racial hostility. The alarming media and scholarly narrative of a population explosion in Africa waiting to invade the West (Caldwell 2019; Collier 2013) has the potential to trigger such degrading and unprovoked remarks from a regular "driver" to a regular "passenger." Such routine occurrences are a drawback to integration and have significant effects on the mental health of African migrants. Due to routine racism, the participants remained restless, anxious and expecting rejection anywhere and at any time.

In this study, self-objectification due to dark skin colour racism was expressed by Fadhila who came to Austria as a child. The racism she experienced growing up resulted in self-hatred and alienation. She despised the abusers' object of hate, which was her skin colour, and in despair cried out for supernatural help: "I was always praying to God, "why can't you change my skin colour?" Fadhila's cry was rooted in a natural human need for inclusion, belonging and acceptance. The need was distorted by racism, making her desperate for a genetic modification of her colour to become someone else. Relatedly, Choma and Prusaczyk (2018) and Van Hout and Wazaify (2021), note that one of the expressions of racially driven self-objectification in Black women is skin bleaching which is not just about beauty but an unending struggle to belong. For Fadhila, the colour of her skin hindered her from belonging to a white-dominant environment. Fadhila demonstrated

the deep psychological problems of growing up as a Black child in a racist environment and the unhealed trauma that is likely to be passed on to future generations (DeGruy 2017; Onwuachi-Willig 2016). In addition to self-hatred, skin colour racism leads to loss of cultural pride and a sense of community, both of which are resilience tools to fight adversity as noted by Van Breda (2018) and Tousignant and Sioui (2009).

Finally, Neema perceived the justice system as prejudiced and racist. She lost a large portion of her legal inheritance and was ordered to vacate her matrimonial home after her white husband's death. She felt abandoned and lost trust in the system under which she argued that Black people "had no chance against whites." Despite Neema's naturalised citizenship, the court verdict reminded her that she was an outsider and migrant. During these time, Neema resorted to faith in God to cope with the loss and pain.

Faith in God and maintaining transnational identities were the main ways of coping with acculturative stress for some participants in this study. They all maintained social contacts with their extended families in Kenya. The social support provided a sense of belonging and collective identity. Nonetheless, as in all other relationships, this did not prevent misunderstandings from arising between migrants and their families in the diaspora and origin countries.

## 8. Conclusions

The findings of this paper show several migration stressors, some of which are gendered and racially rooted. For Kenyan female migrants, remittances and economic development remain a central focus of their migration pursuits. Migrants face various challenges integrating into host countries some of which threaten significant relationships and their psychological wellbeing. In some cases, migration circumstances led to a total breakdown of relationships. The extended family economic dependency affected family relations, generational wealth and was resisted within interracial relationships. Routine racism including stereotype-driven objectification of Black female bodies emerged as challenges for Black women in a European setting. Considering gender pay gaps, low migrant earnings and laxity in enforcement of property laws, Kenyan female migrants are at risk of poverty.

## 9. Limitations

Finding participants for this study was a challenging and frustrating process due to the stigma associated with the disillusionment and failures of migration. These were intensified by my position as an insider and psychotherapist. In a study with Emirati women on divorce, Bromfield (2014) noted that they preferred a foreign researcher in discussing stigmatising experiences than an insider. Similarly, Kabuiku's (2017) study on Kenyan migrants in the United States showed that negative migration experiences were kept secret due to the shame of disillusionment and family expectations.

The sample represented only documented Kenyan female migrants, thus excluding the unique lived experiences of undocumented Kenyans. Preferred ethnic representation was not attained due to a lack of relevant participants. This being insider research, the possibility of participants withholding their deep personal experiences was plausible. This study utilised the IPA approach for data analysis which heavily relies on the researcher's interpretation as the main instrument. However, IPA views the researcher as an integral part of the analysis and interpretation process whose perceived "insider" role is to make sense of the participants making sense of their world, culminating in a double hermeneutic or interpretation (Smith and Osborn 2007; Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). Even so, trustworthiness and reflexivity ensured a balanced interpretation.

## 10. Implications and Recommendations for Further Research

This paper has highlighted migration-related stressors that are often overshadowed by the emphasis on the sole facets of economic development and remittances. These results could be beneficial to policymakers, academia, future migrants, media and diverse institutions working with migrants. Racism affects mental wellbeing, hinders integration

and contradicts Western democratic principles related to human rights. The findings suggest the formulation and legislation of policies that tackle racism in Austria and Europe. Stereotypes of an easy life in Europe are still upheld, while the reality is different. More studies on the lived experiences of the African diaspora are recommended to challenge the stereotypes. The results of such studies could be incorporated into curriculums of institutions of learning, media and the church in Kenya and Africa. There is a need for research on mixed relationships in Austria and their impact on systemic family relations. While this study targeted Kenyan female migrants, it could be transferred to other African groups in Austria due to the homogeneity of social, political and economic issues facing Black people in the diaspora.

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