

## Transitions from collectivistic to individualistic family systems: Kenya and Mexico

STEPHAN M. WILSON\*

ROSARIO ESTEINOU\*\*

**ABSTRACT:** The article presents some of the characteristics of the traditional Kenyan and Mexican extended family systems highlighting and comparing some of the collectivistic principles and values which have supported them in the past. It analyses then some of the factors, such as modernization, religion and others, which have promoted cultural change and impacted on structuring family systems. Both societies and family systems have experienced and are experiencing a transition towards more individualistic patterns, though collectivism principles somehow persist. Some of these tendencies are: freedom in mate selection, marriages based on love, neolocality when forming a family, spreading of the nuclear structure, postponement of marriage, decline in the fertility rates, and adoption of modern contraception. Although both countries have had a unique experience, we found similarities regarding the collectivistic and the individualistic principles which have and are orienting family life.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo presenta algunas de las características de los sistemas familiares extendidos tradicionales kenianos y mexicanos que ponen de manifiesto y comparan algunos de los principios y valores colectivistas que los han sostenido en el pasado. De esta manera,

\* Dean and professor, Department of Human Development and Family Science, College of Human Environmental Sciences at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, United States of America. PhD in Home Economics from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1985.

\*\* Professor and researcher, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Juárez, Tlalpan, México. PhD. in sociology from the University of Turin, Italy, 1989. E-mail: <esteinou@ciesas.edu.mx>.

analiza algunos de los factores, como la modernización, la religión y otros, que han impulsado el cambio cultural y han causado un impacto en la estructura de los sistemas familiares. Tanto las sociedades como los sistemas familiares han atravesado y están atravesando por una transición hacia modelos más individualistas, aunque, de alguna manera, persisten los principios del colectivismo. Algunas de estas tendencias son: la libertad de elección de la pareja, el matrimonio basado en el amor, la neolocalidad al momento de formar una familia, la difusión de la estructura nuclear, la postergación del matrimonio, la disminución de las tasas de fecundidad y la adopción de métodos anticonceptivos modernos. Aunque ambos países han tenido una experiencia única, encontramos similitudes con respecto a los principios colectivistas e individualistas que han venido orientando la vida familiar desde hace tiempo.

*Key words:* individualistic/collectivistic family systems, mexican families, kenyan families.

*Palabras clave:* sistemas familiares individualistas/colectivistas, familias mexicanas, familias kenianas.

This article compares Mexican and Kenyan family systems. Although both countries have different cultures and customs, they have had kinship systems which emphasize collectivistic patterns of family formation, extended organizational structures, mate selection, marital relationships, and gender and age role divisions. Modernization has impacted family life in both countries, generating shifts to more individualized, nuclear patterns even while a modified extended family system continues and co-exists.

Peterson and Hennon (2007: 117-118) argue that an individualistic society holds a value system which gives centrality to the independent self through commitment to beliefs in the private self, individual freedom, autonomous decision making and the search for the self-interest. In contrast collectivistic societies tend to promote the development of the interdependent self through commitment to concepts such as cooperation, mutual support,

maintenance of harmonious relationships and supremacy of the group interests over the individuals. Family systems can be oriented by such value systems as we will further see.

Mexico is about three times the size of Kenya in land mass and population. Agriculture is the mainstay of Kenya's economy with a large majority of the population (82%) living in rural areas. The geographic distribution of Mexico's population is quite different, with over 70% of Mexicans living in urban areas. Mexico has a more diverse economy than Kenya including a more varied assortment of industries, services, agriculture, and petroleum production. In Kenya and Mexico most people are Christian, predominantly Roman Catholic in Mexico. However, in Kenya there is more diversity across sects of Christianity and there is pluralism with Muslims, traditional African religions, and traditional Asian religions.

Kenya was a British colony which achieved independence in 1963, while Mexico was a Spanish colony until 1810 and had a revolution in 1910 (Esteinou, 2008; Ngige, Ondigi, & Wilson, 2008). In spite of social and cultural differences, individuals survive and derive much of their identity from their place in the larger collectives of the social and cultural groups to which they belong. The system of values commonly referred to as collectivism rather than individualism is more common among extended family members in both countries. A key component of collectivism is that the larger family needs and interests take precedence and override individual needs and interests. In Kenya collectivism is based on a unilineal kinship system, while in Mexico collectivism is based on a bilateral system with some unilineal features.

Extended family systems persist in both countries today and are particularly visible through the presence of polygyny and extended patterns where relatives across several generations live in close proximity (Ngige *et al.*, 2008). In Mexico, the 2000 census shows 31% of extended households (INEGI, 2003) in both rural

and urban areas. It is also important to recognize that extended family relationships in both countries have been changing due to modernization and globalization processes. The presence of the extended family or larger kin group as co-residents, influence agents, or control agents is decreasing.

#### KENYAN COLLECTIVISTIC FAMILY SYSTEM

Kenya is a diverse country with varied household structures, kinship systems, and religions, all of which influence and are expressed through family life. Each ethnolinguistic group in Kenya has its own unique cultural variations of marriage and family patterns. Differences also exist between rural and urban families in the structure and makeup of household residences (Ngige *et al.*, 2008). The extended family system is built on collectivistic principles (Wilson, Ngige, & Trollinger, 2003; Wilson and Ngige (2006) that include: patriarchal kinship; an extended family system; the initiation of youth into adulthood; the collective and institutional nature of marriage; polygynous marriages; payment of the bride-wealth by the groom's family to the bride's family; widow inheritance; and a strong emphasis on childbearing and large families.

The patriarchal kinship system is a dominant feature of traditional Kenyan families and is based on unilineal kinship that defines family and marriage structure, descent, inheritance, and legitimacy. One marries into a lineage not just a specific person (Clarke, Kabiru, & Mathur, 2010). Kinship prescribes relationships among people in communities, determines the behavior of one individual to another and it governs marriage customs. Kinship governs the whole life of an individual and defines the connections of each person to everyone else who is alive now, as well as connections to departed members and those yet to be

born (Mbiti, 1970; Wilson & Ngige, 2006). The concept of kinship includes not only those who are living now (*sasa*) but also all those who were known by persons still alive and those dead ancestors who are not remembered personally by anyone alive. The latter are a part of the lineage but from an ancient time (*zamani*). Kinship (lineage) extends into the future to those yet to be born. Marriage and birth are connecting points for all generations and the larger kin group has a stake in these family events. Past generations continue to live through current and future generations (Mbiti, 1970; Wilson *et al.*, 2003).

Marriage is an important aspect of collectivistic relationships, a symbol of status, and an avenue through which individuals gain further acceptance and respect within the community (Nthaka & Kirima, 2001; Wilson *et al.*, 2003). It is a collective and institutional matter and is regarded as an alliance between two families and to a lineage (Ngige *et al.*, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2003).

The extended family system was the norm in Kenya and was manifested through the polygynous family (*i.e.*, a man, his multiple wives, and their children). Each polygynous family was composed of elementary families (*i.e.*, each mother and her children) with the mother as the head. Each elementary family resided in its own house, was allocated a share of property by the male head, and each lived on the same homestead and worked together under the authority of the male head. The polygynous household remained cohesive until the death of the male head when each wife's household was allocated a portion of land (Wilson & Ngige, 2006). Married men owned property and made decisions about its generation and allocation (Ngige, 1993; Wilson & Ngige, 2006). The most prominent feature of family life was the collective life style which emphasized achieving common family goals within the larger and longer lineage.

Parent-arranged marriages were the norm. When self-selected marriages occurred, parental approval and blessing was

a necessary prerequisite. Most girls were married at a young age, immediately after reaching puberty (12-13) and after undergoing the rite of initiation into adulthood. Men married at a later age, commonly 20 to 25 years, due to the requirement of initiation rites into adulthood and accumulation of sufficient bride-wealth (by the family) to facilitate marriage (Wilson *et al.*, 2003). Child betrothal and girl-child marriages also occurred. Virginity at marriage was usually highly valued and regarded. Divorce and separation were highly discouraged because of the subsequent cost to the extended family of returning bride-wealth to the groom's family. At the extreme, there was total disregard of the individual woman's circumstances, even when she was mistreated by her husband and/or by her in-laws (Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

Marriages in Kenya may include monogamy, polygyny, and woman-to-woman marriages (which is not sexual in nature, but rather is based on economic and reproductive exchanges). Fertility is so central to Kenyan marriage that infertility provides a rationale for woman-to-woman marriages among childless women (Wilson *et al.*, 2003). The payment of bride-wealth (Wilson *et al.*, 2003) signifies the compensation to the bride's family for the loss of their daughter's contributions to her family-of-origin. Bride-wealth payment recognizes the wife's value and the appreciation of the groom's family to the bride's family. It enhances the marriage alliance, marital stability, and marks the formalization of the marriage. Bride-wealth is a pledge for the maintenance of the marriage and must be returned if the marriage is dissolved (Wilson & Ngige, 2006; Wilson *et al.*, 2003). Traditionally, cattle were the most common form of bride-wealth, though currently the monetary equivalent is often given.

Due to the institutional nature of marriage as an alliance between two families and as an allegiance to a lineage, widow inheritance was considered as family insurance for widows and orphans and functioned as a vehicle for continuation of family

#### TRANSITIONS FROM COLLECTIVISTIC TO INDIVIDUALISTIC FAMILY SYSTEMS

lineage for the deceased. When a wife died first, the man was expected to re-marry a young wife (Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

The traditional Kenyan family system placed a strong emphasis on childbearing and large families. Children were the ultimate goal of marriage and of sexual activity, and every couple was expected to bear as many children as nature would allow. Women were highly regarded and valued for their childbearing and successful childrearing capabilities. So important was the proof of fertility that an impotent man sought the assistance of a brother or close male relative to produce children for him “in secret.” Likewise, a childless wife would seek the assistance of a sister or a close female relative to play the role of a co-wife and bear children for her. Among some ethnic groups (*e.g.*, Kikuyu, Nandi, Kisii, and Kamba) a barren wife could also “marry another woman” (gynagamy or wife-to-wife) to produce and raise children for her (Wilson *et al.*, 2003).

Traditionally there was little consideration for individual choice, or even rights; individual matters were subjugated to the group. Familism is a result of this type of family system and is part of the larger system of collectivistic values prevalent in Kenya. Support among family members is prescribed and the search for family goals over individual ones is typical.

#### MEXICAN COLLECTIVISTIC FAMILY SYSTEM

The extended family has been widespread in Mexican society. Among many ethnic groups, the extended family was present before the Spaniards arrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and there are still 68 linguistic groups who keep many of these traditional customs (Inali, 2009).

Indigenous Mexican groups have had a variety of kinship systems. Scholars have identified some general features among

ethnic groups who settled in Mesoamerica (*i.e.*, central and southern areas of modern Mexico) and who have a collectivistic social organization. Among the Aztecs, there was an institution which ruled many aspects of social, religious, economic, and political life: the *calpulli*. The *calpulli* was composed of unilineal (patriarchal) lineages and clans that performed multiple functions. Each *calpulli* had its own collective property which was shared and cultivated by several families. Each *calpulli* had its own governors, its own god, and formed a cohesive social unit (Redfield, 1982).

The Mexican kinship system favored the formation of extended and joint families. These were usually large families who lived on the same homestead, had paternal blood ties, and formed an economic and consumption unit (Carrasco, 1993). The establishment of alliances, the distribution of obligations, resources, and rights by lineages, and the organization of group authority were reinforced by sexual values. Within the nuclear family, relationships were structured by a strict division of labor between genders and across ages. Men's authority over children and women was absolute. Marriage was a universal institution and its main goal was the production of children. Cohabitation and premarital sex were proscribed. There was repression, manipulation, and control of sexual behaviors which reinforced the family as the central institution of society. Moderation in sexual life and submission of women to their men (husbands, parents, and in-laws) were instilled among young men and women (López Austin, 1982).

Parent-arranged marriage was enforced by the community. Individual choice was limited and where it occurred, parental approval was a necessary prerequisite to marriage. In Mesoamerican ethnic groups, virginity at marriage also was highly valued. A sexually experienced girl was a disgrace to the family and community. Monogamous marriage was the norm, while polygyny



was not common and was usually restricted to nobles. Both girls and boys married at a young age after reaching puberty. Fathers socialized their sons and mothers their daughters. Community played an important role in socialization. From infancy, children interacted with parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other older family members (Esteinou, 2008).

Although still controversial, many scholars have argued that with the Spanish conquest in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, most indigenous ethnic kinship systems changed from unilineal patterns to bilateral patterns. Guiteras (1968) identified two kinship tendencies in the ethnic groups which settled in Mesoamerica: bilaterality and patrilineality. The bilateral tendency is identified by taboos concerning incest. The patrilineal tendency is observed in the patrilocal residence after marriage and inheritance favoring men, political power in the hands of men, and little sense of genealogy (*i.e.*, ancestors over the second or third ascendant generation were not remembered).

During the colonial period of the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the patriarchal kinship system weakened, but the extended family persisted among indigenous groups. The Spaniards tried to impose Roman Catholicism on the population and made efforts to convert “pagan” groups. The religious and consensual marriage they tried to convey went against traditional ways and thus had more influence among the Spaniards, blended groups, and in urban areas (Dehouve, 2003).

The adoption of Catholic marriage rituals by the indigenous groups was possible because of the definition of the Catholic marriage by the Church during the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Catholic marriage, as well as the traditional indigenous one, was a long process with several stages and rituals. There were two fundamental moments: the betrothal and the marriage ceremony. The first one was defined by the agreement established by the parents of the bride and the groom for the marriage. The second one was the specific

ritual which religiously sanctioned the marriage. The time between the betrothal and the marriage ceremony could vary from some months to several years. The traditional marriage distinguished the moment in which the petition of the bride took place and the rituals which sanctioned that bond. In their attempts to attract indigenous groups and reconcile Indian rituals into Catholicism, the priests identified the betrothals with the moment of the petition of the bride and the religious ritual of marriage with the indigenous rituals and celebrations which sealed the bond in the community (Dehouve, 2003). Both traditions could match the rituals of marriage and local people could practice Catholic rituals without losing their traditions and beliefs (Gonzalbo, 1992).

Traditional marriage rituals persisted within an institutional and collective nature. Marriage was not a matter of individual choice but the result of two families' preferences. Parents led the arrangements and negotiations and other relatives (by blood or by ritual) actively participated in the process as well (Mindek, 2003). Such arrangements were common among almost all ethnic Mesoamerican groups, such as Mixtecos, Otomías, Nahuas, Zapotecos, Popolucas, Triquis, Amuzgos, Chamulas, Tzeltales, and others. For the ritual of the petition of the bride, the father of the groom chose a girl for his son to marry. Then, a matchmaker from the community went to the house of the bride to ask her parent's permission for the groom to marry the girl. The father and other relatives asked several times for permission from the bride's family for her to join their family. Each time they brought presents to the bride's family. In general, the gifts or quantities increased on each visit. When the parents of the bride agreed, both families celebrated and established a date for the marriage (Esteinou, 2008; Franco, 2003; Mindek, 2003).

Another ritual, the service for the bride, has almost disappeared. The groom spent a period working with his future

father-in-law as compensation for losing his daughter. These benefits and transfers conveyed the culturally prescribed legitimacy of the marriage (Bell, 1997). During the celebration by the bride's extended family members, food and the drink were consumed as part of the festivities. Among some groups, the bride was given one or more sets of clothes, the bride's dress, and some personal accessories; remnants of this tradition remain today. The bride-wealth consisting of metal objects and cattle were not consumed at the ceremony but were for the bride's male relatives so that they might acquire wives (Mindek, 2003).

During the colonial period, the extended family system persisted with some changes. Due to wars, epidemics, and the establishment of Spanish colonial institutions, it was difficult to form large and complex family groups. The nuclearization of family structure caused the extended family to evolve into a series of nuclear families who settled in a shared homestead. The men who headed these nuclear families sustained patrilineal blood ties and performed economic activities together. These corporate groups had a developmental cycle. The father lived with his family in a single household. When the sons married, the new couples lived at the groom's house (with the family of his father). The new brides were under the authority and surveillance of the mother-in-law. When the new couples had children, the father of the groom gave each son a part of his land so that he could form a separate nuclear family. This pattern was followed by all the sons, except the last one who was responsible for taking care of his parents as they aged, and upon their death the last son would keep the house. Other forms of solidarity and family obligations were typical of this model (*e.g.*, cooperation of all the sons for the expenses of the death rituals for their parents, helping brothers build their houses, cooperation with labor for other activities, and providing economic resources to make other celebrations of the life cycle) (Robichaux, 2006). This

type of organization is still present among some Mesoamerican ethnic groups.

A strong hierarchy, inequality, and dependence characterized family relationships within the couple and between parents and children. This is observed both in the Catholic and in the civil conception of marriage which was based on the legal authority of men. Men had the right to discipline their women and children. The cultural norm legitimized their submission to his authority. Men would expect absolute obedience from them; in return, men owed protection to their women and children (Boyer, 1989).

#### TRANSITIONS TO INDIVIDUALISTIC FEATURES IN KENYAN AND MEXICAN EXTENDED FAMILIES

Kenyan and Mexican extended family systems have been experiencing ongoing transitions leading to more individualistic social organizations. In Mexico, this process has continued to unfold across the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while in Kenya the individualistic focus is more recent and is still dramatically unfolding. For both countries, contact and interaction with various external western ideas and institutions, as well as economic changes, geographic and job mobility, urbanization, and other modern forces have weakened traditional extended family systems. In Kenya, the introduction of modern/imported religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, colonialism, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic have had a decisive influence on family life. In Mexico, migration to the United States and the influence of modernization, urbanization, and sociocultural change have caused fundamental changes. In Kenya and in Mexico, as in other parts of the world, the movement toward globalization has had a tremendous impact on contemporary families (Esteinou, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

Various influences have promoted shifts in both countries: from collectivism to individualism; from large to small families; postponement of marriage; increases in the number and proportions of non-marital and other types of families; decline in the fertility rate; adoption of modern contraception; increase in one-parent households; and, increase in cohabitation of unmarried adults. In Kenya there are continuing shifts: from polygynous to monogamous marriages; initiation to alternative rites of passage to adulthood; shifts in child care arrangements; institutional care of HIV/AIDS orphans; and threats to adult longevity. In Mexico there has been an increase in longevity (Esteinou, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

Shifts in family patterns reflect generational differences. Older Kenyans tend to prefer customary marriages, bride-wealth exchange, familism over individualism, parent-arranged marriages over self-selected marriage, multiple wives and larger families, widow inheritance, and extended family settings especially in rural areas. Statistics from the 1999 census indicate that 25% of the older women were in polygynous marriages compared with 10% of younger women (Ngige *et al.*, 2008). Modern, young, educated and westernized couples prefer self-selected love marriage to a parent-arranged marriage, a formal marriage ceremony over traditional or customary marriage, monogamy over polygyny, individualism over familism, smaller family size, and a nuclear family pattern or quasi-extended family setting over the traditional extended family structure.

Similar shifts can be observed in Mexican society across generations. Older people are more likely to prefer customary marriage practices (*e.g.*, exchange of presents and goods during petition and marriage), familism, parent-arranged marriages (but tolerate love marriages), large families, and living in extended family settings, especially in rural areas. Older generations in Mexican society have incorporated more features of individual-

ism within the extended family system than in Kenya. Multiple wives and widow inheritance are not part of the Mexican system. In contrast, younger generations follow a similar pattern as their Kenyans counterparts (Wilson & Esteinou, 2010).

Since the extended family system goes beyond family structure, it is difficult to grasp the extent of its influence among families or accurately assess how much it has been affected by modernization and globalization processes. The majority of educated and medium and high socioeconomic status Kenyans and Mexicans have adopted partially Western culture while retaining some measure of their own traditions. These groups show lower fidelity to their ethnic-cultural practices in marriage and family life than was true in previous generations. Their socio-cultural orientations are grounded increasingly in individualistic principles.

Illiterate (30%) and poor Kenyans (60%) are more likely to embrace East African customary practices governing marriage and family life. Their sociocultural orientations are grounded in collectivistic principles. Between the Western and customary positions is the blended African-Western culture. This transitional group is trying to mesh African and Western culture in regard to marriage and family life. Family divergence, therefore, exists on a continuum of sociocultural orientation—wholly Western, wholly African, or a blend African-Western culture with various degrees of affinity to both world views in marriage and family life (Ngige *et al.*, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

Collectivistic principles seem more obvious in rural Mexico and Kenya than urban areas in both countries. But, collectivist principles continue to be prevalent in urban areas through kin network support which orients individuals and family behavior. Some influences on the nuclear family system are due to the deeper influence of western life styles and views in urban areas and for those who have higher levels of education. The nuclear

family system has been developing since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Mexico and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Kenya. Freedom in mate selection, the importance of love in family relationships, the formation of nuclear family structures, the economic and social independence of the couple from their families-of-origin, and the development of modern family roles (*e.g.*, mother/housewife, father/breadwinner, and their dependent children) are more ingrained and these patterns are a more abiding influence on Mexican families. Mexican families have kept some collectivistic features such as familism, living in close proximity to other family, and respect for adults and others (Esteinou, 2008).

Kenyan society is experiencing important changes. In spite of a strong pattern of collectivism in customary practices governing marriage and family life, the nuclear family (even in more traditional areas) has been the most prevalent structure, accounting for 58% of families (Kenya, 2003; Ngige *et al.*, 2008). Polygynous extended families account for 16% of families being more common among older Kenyans (Kenya, 2003). Ngige *et al.* (2008) observe two important types of family patterns which represent this process of transition from collectivistic to individualistic patterns. The first is the modified extended-nuclear family characterized by several nuclear families whose members are related by blood, marriage or adoption living in the same homestead or in close proximity to one another. This family pattern is found in predominantly patriarchal clans among Kenyans living in rural areas, as well as among Asian families living in urban areas. The second pattern is the nuclear-extended family which is a blend of quasi-nuclear families with live-in relatives, or nonrelatives who depend entirely on the nuclear family household. The nonrelatives, or fictive kin, are considered family members. This pattern cuts across all ethnic groups and is commonly found among educated, well-to-do families living in urban areas, which often face expectations that require them to foster needy relatives.

In Mexico both the modified-extended nuclear family and the nuclear-extended family have been present for a long time (Esteinou, 2008). The 1990 census reported that 24% of the households were extended while in 2000 there were 31% (INEGI, 2003). The increase is more complex since the same extended families show increasing tendencies for individualistic patterns. Even their formation reflects more individualistic patterns. Echarri (in press) has shown that most of these families are the result of separation or divorce, where the woman and her children return to her family-of-origin; or in rural areas they return because the husband has migrated to the United States. In the past, the woman would have stayed with her husband's family and under the authority of her mother-in-law following the patrilocality residence principle. Modern women are breaking a tradition and assuming a personal choice, with the result being that collectivistic (*i.e.*, returning to their families of origin) and some individualistic patterns (the decision to separate from the husband's family) co-exist.

In both Kenya and Mexico, marriage appears to focus on individual choice and the couple rather than the larger collective family. There is more freedom of choice in mate selection by the young and there has been a shift from parental choice of suitor to self-choice. This is part of an emerging shift from parent-arranged marriages to individual companionship marriages. In Kenya, bride-wealth payment continues to shift from the transfer of cattle, other non-monetary goods and services to the transfer of money from the groom's to the bride's family, a practice that is increasingly symbolic. There is also a growing pattern for the groom to raise the bride-wealth himself without assistance from relatives, especially among the urban and more educated population. Ironically, the trend toward demanding payment of high monetary bride-wealth for daughters is becoming common in modern Kenya even as traditional bride-wealth of



cattle, etc. is decreasing. Wedding ceremonies have undergone changes from a traditional relatively inexpensive and prolonged marriage ritual to an expensive one-day western type wedding ceremony (Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

In Mexico, the transfers and arrangements for marriage have also become monetary, but, in many cases, young girls rebel against this, arguing that they are being sold (Mindek, 2003). There is more interaction between the couple prior to marriage. Girlfriends and boyfriends appear in public, and a period of courtship has been socially accepted, giving more freedom of choice to young people in the matter of choosing a partner. Patrilocal residence after marriage is being modified due to the migration of young men to the United States. When they go, they save money for the wedding and to be able to buy a house that is separate from their father's house (Mummert, 1996). Neolocality and individualism are being promoted by migration and are weakening collectivist traditions. Weddings continue to be expensive, though less so than in the past. They continue to be a relatively traditional celebration where the extended family, relatives, and the community participate. When weddings are held is also changing among rural youth since family members who reside in the United States often travel south to celebrate such events with their families (Mummert, 1996).

One important and consequential trend of cultural change toward individualism is the burden of additional expenses on the families' economic resources for religious weddings. There is also a tendency to skip the religious ceremony and the union is established through what is called "stealing the bride," in rural areas where cohabitation is common. In this, the man and the woman agree to elope and she goes to live at her parent-in-law's house. After the stealing has been consummated, the bridegroom's parents tell the bride's parents that she is with them and they can start a simplified ritual of "petition of the bride." Since the cost

of the religious wedding is high, religious marriage is delayed and an inexpensive civil ceremony is celebrated (González, 1996).

Extended families in Kenya and in Mexico have shifted from being larger to smaller in size. Factors include postponement of marriage and the declining fertility rate, increased use of modern contraception to space or limit births, and the view of children as economic liabilities to parents rather than as assets to the family business, particularly in urban areas. The age at which Kenyan women and men first marry has risen over recent years. In recent years this gap has been declining, with women marrying at an average of 20 years compared with 25 years for men. In earlier times in Mexico, girls would marry just after puberty, but men also would marry quite young. In recent years women and men tend to marry at later ages (around 23 for women and men at 25) reducing the distance between the ages of the couple (Gómez de León, 2001; Quilodrán, 2001).

The fertility rate has also declined drastically in both countries from the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Kenya, this has changed from 6.7 children per woman in 1978 to 4.7 in 1999. A rural woman can expect to have two more children on average (5.1) than an urban woman (3.1). And, increasingly, women prefer to have small families rather than large ones. In Mexico, in the 1970s, women had 7.2 children per woman, while in 2000 they had 2.4. Recent research also indicates that Mexican women would like to have just two children. In rural areas the number of children per woman is higher (Conapo, 2002; Esteinou, 2008).

Knowledge and use of modern family planning methods has continued to rise over the years in Kenya and Mexico. By 1998, virtually all Kenyan married women (98%) and men (99%) were knowledgeable about modern contraception. Use of contraception rose from 27% in 1993 to 39% in 1998, with noticeable differentials by education (Wilson & Ngige, 2006). In

Mexico, limiting and spacing birth practices and the significant increase in the use of modern contraceptive methods have been the main causes of the decline of the fertility rate. Estimates in Mexico are that the proportion of women in couple relationships and of fertile age who used contraceptive methods increased from 30% in 1976 to almost 71% in 2000 (Conapo, 2002). Initiation of the young into adulthood was a prerequisite to marriage among many ethnic communities in Kenya. Since the introduction of formal education and Christianity, female genital mutilation has been legally and culturally proscribed. Alternative rituals or markers of passage into adulthood have been introduced (Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

One-parent households are increasing in both countries, though their formation process is different. In Kenya, this type of family is a choice by women to remain single yet have children outside marriage, whereas in Mexico, this kind of family commonly results from separation or divorce. In Kenya, marriage was practically universal for women of reproductive age in the past, whereas currently 30% of women have never married and many of them are choosing to have children outside of marriage. In Mexico, monoparental nuclear families increased to 8.5%, though this is conservative since many women in rural areas return to their parent's house when they separate and divorce and are not counted in these figures (Esteinou, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006).

Cohabitation of unmarried adults is increasing in both countries as a result of the influence of individualistic principles. In traditional Kenyan society, and until relatively recently, cohabitation was rare and regarded with disdain. In modern Kenya, many young people are postponing marriage, and opting to live together informally as unmarried couples. One survey reported that 3% of the women were living together with a man compared to only 1% of the men reporting they were cohabiting

(Wilson & Ngige, 2006). In Mexico, cohabitation has also increased but official censuses have considered customary marriages as consensual unions or cohabitation. Customary marriage is not considered as cohabitation by those who understand themselves to be married by such customs. In 1982 these unions accounted for 16.7% while in 1996 they reached 26.7% (Conapo, 1999). Cohabitation is more common among young people. According to Gómez de León (2001) there are two types of cohabitation. One type represents an alternative to a legal and Catholic marriage. This traditional view is more frequent among less educated groups. The second is a prelude to marriage a modern pattern more common among more educated groups.

HIV/AIDS has contributed to a shift away from extended families in Kenya. More than 2.2 million people are infected and 1.5 million have already developed the disease. As a result, the life expectancy has decreased to about 50 and there are many orphans who lack proper care, basic needs, and the nurturing socialization of their families (Ngige *et al.*, 2008; Wilson & Ngige, 2006). In Mexico, migration has had an impact on weakening the influence and primacy of an extended family system. There is a decreasing amount of influence over traditional patterns in mate selection, parenting structures and practices, and even and in patrilocal residence after marriage. Families have been affected as men tend to be out of town for long periods of time. Other emergent patterns include more stressful parenting since women have to perform many of the tasks and functions of the migrant father couple relationships are difficult to maintain, and unfamiliar types of work must be performed by women (Esteinou, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

We have discussed extended families' patterns even while recognizing that family patterns are complex, diverse, and constantly shifting. Never-the-less, it is possible to identify ways in which Mesoamerican and East African families are undergoing transitions. Some transitions resist patterns that might simply be seen as imitations of patterns found elsewhere. The unique complex of forces, history, and challenges of contemporary Mexican and Kenyan families has produced distinctive responses that are functional but different than past patterns of family life. There are important and observable differences between the traditional and the modern families as they address the needs of their members. Further, the similarities and differences are useful for scholars and practitioners as they consider likely trends, emergent problems, and possible alternative solutions to challenges facing families in these two different contexts.

REFERENCES

- Bell, Duran (1997). "Wealth transfers occasioned by marriage: A comparative reconsideration". In Thomas Schweitzer & Douglas R. White (eds.), *Kinship networks and exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 187-209.
- Boyer, Richard (1989). "Las mujeres, 'la mala vida' y la política del matrimonio". In Asunción Lavrin (ed.), *Sexualidad y matrimonio en la América Hispánica. Siglos XVI-XVIII*. México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes/Grijalbo.
- Carrasco, P. (1993). "La familia conjunta en el México antiguo: El caso de Molotla". In Pilar Gonzalbo (ed.), *Historia de la familia*. México: Instituto Mora/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.
- Clarke, Shelley, Caroline Kabiru, & Rohini Mathur (2010). "Relationship transitions among youth in urban Kenya". *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72: 73-88.
- Consejo Nacional de Población, Conapo (1999). *La situación demográfica en México*. México: Consejo Nacional de Población.
- Consejo Nacional de Población, Conapo (2002). *La situación demográfica en México*. México: Consejo Nacional de Población.
- Dehouve, Danièle (2003). "El matrimonio indio frente al matrimonio español. Siglos XVI al XVIII". In David Robichaux (ed.), *El matrimonio en Mesoamérica ayer y hoy*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, pp. 75-94.
- Echarri, Carlos (in press). "Los hogares en la Encuesta Nacional de Salud Reproductiva 2003", manuscrito.
- Esteinou, Rosario (2008). *La familia nuclear en México: lecturas de su modernidad. Siglos XVI al XX*. México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social/Miguel Ángel Porrúa.
- Franco Pelletier, Víctor M. (2003). "El ritual de petición matrimonial entre los amuzgos". In David Robichaux (ed.), *El matrimonio en Mesoamérica ayer y hoy*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, pp. 137-156.
- Gómez de León, José (2001). "Los cambios en la nupcialidad y la formación de familias: Algunos factores explicativos". In José

- Gómez de León & Cecilia Rabell (eds.), *La población de México. Tendencias y perspectivas sociodemográficas hacia el siglo XXI*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Consejo Nacional de Población, pp. 207-241.
- Gonzalbo, Pilar (1992). "La familia' y las familias en el México colonial". In *Estudios Sociológicos*, 10: 693-712.
- González, Soledad (1996). "Novias pedidas, novias robadas, polígamos y madres solteras. Un estudio de caso en el México rural". In María de la Paz López (ed.), *Hogares, familias: Desigualdad, conflicto, redes solidarias y parentales*. México: Sociedad Mexicana de Demografía, pp. 29-38.
- Guiteras, C. (1968). "Social organization". In Sol Tax (ed.), *Heritage of conquest. The ethnology of Middle America*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, pp. 97-118.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, INEGI (2003). *XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000*. México: INEGI.
- Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas, Inali (2009). *Catálogo de las lenguas indígenas nacionales*, México: Inali.
- Peterson, Gary W., & Charles Hennon (2007). "Influencias parentales en la competencia social de los adolescentes en dos culturas: una comparación conceptual entre Estados Unidos y México". In Rosario Esteinou (ed.), *Fortalezas y desafíos de las familias en dos contextos: Estados Unidos de América y México*. México: CIESAS/DIF, pp. 111-165.
- Republic of Kenya (2003). *Kenya demographic and health survey: 2003*. Calverton, MD: Macro International.
- López Austin, Alfredo (1982). "La sexualidad entre los antiguos nahuas". In S. Alberro, A. Bourgiere, R. Boyer, J. González, S. Gruzinsky, M. Legros, A. López Austin & E. Malvido (eds.), *Familia y sexualidad en Nueva España*. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública-Fondo de Cultura Económica, pp. 141-177.
- Mbiti, John S. (1970). *African religions and philosophy*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Mindek, Dubravka (2003). "Formación y disolución del matrimonio indígena: una revisión crítica". In David Robichaux (ed.), *El*

- matrimonio en Mesoamérica ayer y hoy*. México: Universidad Iberoamericana, pp. 331-360.
- Mummert, Gail (1996). "Cambios en la estructura y organización familiares en un contexto de emigración masculina y trabajo asalariado femenino: Estudio de caso en un valle agrícola de Michoacán". In María de la Paz López (ed.), *Hogares, familias: Desigualdad, conflicto, redes solidarias y parentales*. México: Sociedad Mexicana de Demografía, pp. 39-46.
- Ngige, Lucy W. (1993). *Intra-household Resource Allocation, Decision Making And Child Nutritional Status in Rural Thika, Kenya*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
- Ngige, Lucy W., Alice N. Ondigi, & Stephan M. Wilson (2008). "Family diversity in Kenya". In Charles B. Hennon & Stephan M. Wilson (eds.), *Families in Global Context*. New York: Routledge, pp. 207-234.
- Nthaka, N.L., & Kirima, M.D. (2001). "Marriage in the cultural Meru society". Unpublished manuscript, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.
- Quilodrán, Julieta (2001). "Un siglo de matrimonio en México". In José Gómez de León & Cecilia Rabell (eds.), *La población de México. Tendencias y perspectivas sociodemográficas hacia el siglo XXI*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica/Consejo Nacional de Población, pp. 242-270.
- Redfield, Rober (1982). "El calpulli-barrio en un pueblo mexicano actual". *Nueva Antropología*, year 5, no. 18: 85-98.
- Robichaux, David (2006). "Hogar, familia y grupos de acción: El sistema familiar mesoamericano ante los desafíos del siglo XXI". In Rosario Esteinou (ed.), *Fortalezas y desafíos de las familias en dos contextos: Estados Unidos de América y México*. México: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, pp. 485-517.
- Wilson, Stephan M., & Rosario Esteinou (2010). *Transitions from Collectivistic Toward Individualistic Family Systems: The Cases of Kenya and Mexico*. Pan-African Family Strengths International Conference. Mombasa, Kenya.



TRANSITIONS FROM COLLECTIVISTIC TO INDIVIDUALISTIC FAMILY SYSTEMS

- Wilson, Stephan M., & Lucy W. Ngige (2006). "Families in sub-Saharan Africa". In Bron B. Ingoldsby & Suzanna Smith (eds.). *Families in Global and Multicultural Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 247-273.
- Wilson, Stephan M., Lucy W. Ngige, & Linda J. Trollinger (2003). "Connecting generations: Kamba and Maasai paths to marriage in Kenya". In Raeann Hamon & Bron B. Ingoldsby (eds.) *Mate Selection Across Cultures*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 95-118.