

Contested Fathering: Cameroonian Fathers Facing the Welfare State Parenthood

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Abstract : This article focuses on challenges of parenthood for Sub-Saharan African fathers in Finland. In this analysis Finland represents a Nordic welfare society where family relationships are strongly guided by national family policies and discourses. These policies are based on both traditional ideas of a proper Finnish family, as well as on the contemporary waves of female liberation and emphasis on children's rights. We analyze how especially Cameroonian fathers perceive their parenthood positions and how they characterize and frame their fathering experiences in relation to the mainstream sociopolitical, cultural and national representations of fatherhood in Finland. The analysis is based on interviews and narrative reports collected among Cameroonian fathers living in Finland with their African spouses. The scrutiny shows that in the context where the mainstream cultural and national family representation is created by equality between parents and also between parents and their children, and where "good fatherhood" is created by embodied presence and warm relationships with children these fathers have difficulties: They have to fulfill another fatherhood duty - bread-winning - and thus ensure their labor possibilities all the time, from very marginalized positions of the labor market. When comparing their fatherhood position with the one in Cameroon they also feel embarrassed as the Finnish educational system teaches and encourages their children to challenge their authority as up-raising adults, which in Cameroon could not be possible.

Keywords : Cameroonian fathers, perception, fathering experiences, Finland

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