

- *Households – Migration – Namibia – Methods – Remittances*

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Can Households be Multilocal? Conceptual and Methodological Considerations based on a Namibian Case Study

Können Haushalte multilokal sein? Konzeptionelle und methodologische Überlegungen auf der Basis einer Fallstudie aus Namibia

With 2 Figures and 3 Tables

This contribution deals with circular migration, remittances and rural-urban support networks in Namibia's southern Kunene region and with the question of how to conceptualise the household as a unit of analysis in the context of these dynamics. Based on an outline of the methodology used to gather quantifiable data on rural-urban exchange and empirical data, it focuses on the domestic unit and analyses its role in the context of high mobility and rural-urban networks. It offers a critique of the 'multilocal household' approach and suggests the concept of translocal livelihoods as an alternative approach.

1. Introduction: Households and Migration

Since about the mid-1980s, scholars of migration have increasingly shifted their attention from the individual migrant to the household as a decision-making unit, and thus as the central unit of analysis. Recent literature acknowledges the role of migration – temporary or permanent –, particularly of rural-urban migration, in increasing the social security of rural and urban households alike (e.g. *de Haan and Rogaly 2002; Satterthwaite and Tacoli 2002*). Scholars of the 'New Economics of

Migration', for example, have demonstrated that migration is a crucial strategy by which households can diversify their income and spread risks (e.g. *Stark 1991*). However, reliable data on remittances from rural-to-urban migration are still rare (*Trager 2005: 23*), and the potential role of these remittances in poverty reduction and territorial development strategies is not yet well understood (*de Haan and Rogaly 2002*). This is partially due to a lack of methodological and conceptual clarity pertaining to the household as the unit of analysis in the process of migration.

Needless to say, the actual definition of the concept of the household itself is highly contested. Although one might agree upon the fact that the household is a social unit on a scale between the individual and larger social units (Hammel 1984), anthropologists widely acknowledge that there exists no “universal, etc, one-size-fits-all definition of the household” (Sanjek 2004: 285). Critics argue that the concept of the household has a eurocentric bias and frequently assumes timeless, stable preferences, thereby obscuring crucial dynamics of internal resource allocation and power relations (Hart 1992; Wilk 1997; for an overview see Thüler 2002). Attempting to define the concept becomes even more challenging in instances of high individual mobility, as in South Africa or Namibia, where Apartheid and the contract labour system have created systems of cyclical (return) migration that continue to have a profound effect on family structures and household compositions (Murray 1981; Spiegel 1986; Posel 2003; Townsend et al. 2006).

Despite these difficulties and criticism, I share the view that the household is a basic structure in the organisation of everyday life (Townsend et al. 2006), as well as a meaningful unit of analysis for studying processes of adaptation and change (Wilk 1997). Also, for methodological reasons, it is an essential unit of enumeration. As van de Walle (2006: xxif.) puts it, the household “... merely constitutes the most practical system for organising the pattern of residence of a population accessible to interviewers whose task is to execute a complete and non-redundant count of a population”. This rather pragmatic perspective bears significant advantages for systematic data collection and comparison through time and space, as will be outlined later. This is not to deny that there are other appropriate units of analysis on which to focus in migration research, such as individuals, families or communities. A discussion of the challenges and implications involved in these approaches, however, is beyond the scope of this contribution.

Based on these premises, this contribution sets out to explore how households can be used as units of analysis in a social setting characterised by migration. I will use empirical data on migration and rural-urban exchange networks from Namibia to illustrate my point. This case study suggests that an analytically precise definition of the household is needed in order to fully understand the dimensions and complexities of rural-urban migration and support relations. Thereby I will focus on three issues: Firstly, I point to some important peculiarities in support relations, particularly on age and gender patterns. These important differentiations, I argue, are not likely to be disentangled if the notion of a ‘multilocal household’ is superimposed over these sets of relationships. Secondly, I will demonstrate that it is almost impossible to isolate ‘multilocal households’ as meaningful social units given the multitude of rural-urban (and rural-rural) relationships, and thirdly I want to show that individuals build up or attach themselves to various households during their lives. In the subsequent discussion, I address the notion of ‘multilocal households’ and argue that this concept is misleading and analytically fuzzy, because it mixes up kinship-based networks with households. As an alternative approach I then suggest the concept of translocal livelihoods. In what follows, I will outline the regional setting of the research area, and then go on to describe the methodological approach I used to gather systematic data on migration and rural-urban support networks in Namibia.

2. Case Study: Migration in Kunene South – A Brief Introduction

Namibia’s population structure is profoundly shaped by processes of migration. As is the case in other African countries, it seems that for many Namibians, migration is an everyday, rather than an exceptional experience, and a common necessity for making a livelihood (*de Bruijn et al.*



Fig. 1 Rural and urban research areas (Cartography: Ole Neumann) / Ländliche und städtische Untersuchungsgebiete

2001: 2). This situation is certainly the case in the Fransfontein area, southern Kunene region, where most of the research presented in this article was conducted (Fig. 1).

The Fransfontein area is part of the southern Kunene region that was formerly known as ‘Damaraland’, a homeland established in the late 1960s by the South African Administration in the course of implementing apartheid policies in what was then their colony. The area is arid and recurrent droughts are endemic to the climatic regime. In the rural hinterland, water, which is usually accessed through drilled boreholes, and pasture are the major limiting factors for human settlements. Most rural settlements are small, therefore, consisting of about 3 to 20 households. They are located on communal land and are often difficult to access due to insufficient infrastructure. The local people refer to these micro-settlements as ‘farms’.

Because of both historical and recent processes of in-migration, farms are ethnically

mixed, with people of Damara, Herero and Ovambo origin making up the majority. Cultural practices are widely shared, and ethnicity is no reliable indicator of a given household’s socioeconomic position; it even crosscuts extended family units (Greiner 2008). The demographic structure of these farms is shaped by a high degree of individual mobility that connects these settlements both to nearby and to more distant towns and cities. Circulation between rural and urban areas is by far the most significant form of migration in the region. There is also some degree of rural-to-rural migration, while international migration is negligible. These patterns of migration are reflected in a skewed age distribution. While older people as well as pre-school children are over-represented in the rural farm settlements, most children of school age and able-bodied adults live in towns, in urban and industrial areas. They either migrated to these places or stayed behind when their parents moved to the rural hinterland (Box 1 illustrates these dynamics).

Text Box 1 The dynamics of migration and household affiliation – an ethnographic vignette

The translocal biographies of the *Shipanga* family, taken from my ethnographic field notes, can serve to illustrate the dynamics of migration and household affiliation. *Festus*, head of a rural household on the farm, originates from Ovamboland. As contract worker during Apartheid times, he had worked in many places but mostly in the Central Namibian town of Outjo where he spent most of his working life and where he met his wife, *Tandi*. *Tandi* grew up in the rural Fransfontein area, but spent many years outside, among others in Windhoek, where she lived with her mother's sister's household during her primary school years. When her parents died, she took over their rural household. *Festus* and *Tandi* married late in life, and upon retirement, *Festus* left his own household in Outjo with his former wife and moved to *Tandi's* home on the farm. As is common in the area, both partners have children out of wedlock, a total of seven, and together they have two daughters. From his earnings in town, they managed to build a solid rural homestead and start a large herd of cattle. Today, they belong to the relatively well-off people in the area, and – like most households in the area – they have an open door for their relatives, who come to live in the rural for some time. During the time of my research, the number of household members ranged from five to ten. Based on this basic information, I want to focus on the biographies of three of their children, respectively grandchildren, to briefly illustrate how people and households relate in the Namibian context of high mobility.

Ferdinand (*1974) is the youngest out-of-wedlock child of *Tandi*. As a member of his maternal household, he grew up on the farm. He went to primary school in Fransfontein, where he dropped out early and returned to the farm. At the age of 21 he moved to Windhoek in search for work. There, he was accommodated at the household of his uncle (*Tandi's* brother), until he earned enough money to establish his own household. Some years ago, he and his wife decided that time had come to establish a second home in the rural area. They built a small house on the same farm where his maternal household is located, bought some cattle and goats and employed a worker to look after their assets while they spent most of their time in Windhoek. As soon as possible they want to move there and give up their urban home, because life in town is too expensive, as they say.

Elli (*1975) is the elder daughter of *Festus* and *Tandi*. She grew up on the farm until she was sent to school in the nearby town of Khorixas, where she stayed in the household of a relative. She finished secondary school and got a job with Nampost, the Namibian postal cooperation, in an office in Swakopmund. During that time, she got her first child, which she brought to the farm to be raised by his grandparents. After some years, she fell sick and, after a lengthy stay in hospital, decided to give up her home in Swakopmund and move back to the farm to join her parental homestead. About two years later, she got married and moved to her husband's house in Khorixas together with her son.

Maja (*1979) is the son of *Festus'* oldest daughter. He was born in Outjo where he grew up until his grandfather decided to take him to the farm. Two years later, he was sent back to Outjo to join primary school and stay with his mother's household. He dropped out in class 10 and went back to his grandfather's household for some time, until he decided to go to Windhoek. There, he joined the household of *Tandi's* brother, but soon realised that he would not get a job that enabled him to stand on his own legs there. For some years, he oscillated between Windhoek and Outjo in search for jobs, until he decided to re-join his grandfather's household on the farm. When he impregnated his girlfriend half a year later, he decided to move back to town to stay with her in his mother's household, but after she gave birth, he brought them to the farm.

The three biographical sketches show that there are a high mobility and strong connections between rural-urban migrants and their rural homes. Returning to the rural home is often a solution to difficult situations in life, but there are also options in urban areas, particularly within kinship networks. In all cases, however, people move between different households to which they attach themselves or which they build up themselves.

My survey results, for ten farming settlements surrounding the village of Fransfontein, show that close to 21 per cent of the resident population is 60 years old or older². This is about three times the national average. A similar share of the population is seven years old or younger. Of these, close to 40 per cent are foster children. This social practice is widely found throughout Namibia (e.g. *Iken* 1999; *Pauli* 2007). Because schooling facilities are too far away from the farms for daily commuting, children leave for more urban areas at the age of six to seven. They usually stay with urban-based relatives, also to find employment after finishing their schooling and subsequently settle down near their place of work. Most of them frequently return to the farms for holidays or in times of unemployment. It is very common for people to move back to the farm upon retirement from their urban jobs.

Livestock farming with goats, sheep and cattle is widely practiced throughout the region. Possession of livestock is highly stratified, but most households keep at least some animals for meat and dairy production at a subsistence level. Livestock is privately owned, with the household head usually owning the biggest share of animals. Most children and grandchildren of the household head, however, own some cattle and goats, given to them by their parents or grandparents. These animals are mostly kept in family herds and are looked after by the rural household members or by hired herd-

ers. Some of the economically successful migrants practice 'part-time farming'; they actively invest in their herds and employ in-migrated herdsmen to look after their property.

In terms of contributions made to household incomes, strategies other than livestock farming are predominant. While there is some limited cash income from petty trade and casual jobs as well as from regular work (usually for local government agencies), old-age pensions and remittances in cash and kind clearly make up the bulk of the income (see *Tab. 1*). Most households make a livelihood by a combination of transfer incomes from pensions and remittances, sometimes supplemented with revenues from livestock farming.

2.1 Methods: multisited survey-based research

The data presented are based on long-term, multisited ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2005/06, covering the rural Fransfontein area as well as urban areas, particularly Windhoek and Walvis Bay. Against the above-sketched background, ethnographic research revealed that most rural-urban support relations are vertical flows, i.e. support relations between parent/grandparent and child/grandchild. It also turned out that remittances sent within the kin-based support networks not only enable the survival of many

Tab. 1 Shares of different sources in household incomes in survey areas in % (N = 74) / *Anteile der verschiedenen Quellen am Haushaltseinkommen in den Untersuchungsgebieten in % (N = 74)*

Petty trade and casual jobs	19
Formal employment	10
Livestock sales	10
Social pensions	28
Remittances	33
Total	100

rural households, but also boost the growing socioeconomic stratification.

In order to better assess the dimensions of the rural-urban networks and the quantity of goods and money transferred within them, I carried out a household survey in the rural research area. Despite the high degree of individual mobility, the demarcation of individual households proved to be no major problem. Rural homesteads usually consist of one or several huts or houses that are at least symbolically fenced. According to the emic perspective, each residential unit keeping its own active fireplace is considered a household, be it an individual or a large number of persons that actually resides there. If, due to the high mobility of individuals, habitual membership of a given person was doubtful, the question of whether that person had his or her personal belongings at the rural home helped to clarify the issue. Furthermore, absent children and grandchildren of the household head can usually claim residence in their household of origin, as well as the right to set up their own household in the community upon returning to the farm (see also *Rhode* 1993). For convenience, I referred to those members currently absent from the homestead as de-jure household members. Those that habitually lived there I termed de-facto members. This typology does not correspond to the strict definition of de-jure and de-facto household membership as used in many other surveys (see *van de Walle* 2006), but rather to the looser employment of those terms in ethno-demographic methods (*Lang* and *Pauli* 2002).

In the survey, genealogical data and ethnographic census information (cf. *Pauli* 2008) were combined with a questionnaire on issues of migration, economic background (such as livestock possession and livelihood characteristics) and social support relations (rural-to-urban and urban-to-rural). The genealogical method was used to establish a family tree of the household head and his spouse, covering all

living children and grandchildren. Based on this (computerised) chart and on information gathered from answers to census questions submitted to each individual, it was possible to gather basic data about the actual population in the rural households as well as the absent relatives, including their whereabouts.

The actual survey consisted of different questionnaires that were directed to the people habitually living in the rural households as well as to the absent children and grandchildren of the household head and his spouse (loosely termed de-jure population). For each absent child and grandchild of 15 years and older, the household head and his partner were asked a series of questions concerning the migration biography of this household member, the frequency, amount and content of remittances they sent to the rural areas, the material support they received from the rural areas, and the estimated value of the items sent and received. In addition, the household head was asked if the household was involved in any other support relations with people living outside the area, e.g. with brothers and sisters or friends.

With the help of local fieldwork assistants, I managed at a later stage of the research to trace individual migrants from my rural research area to towns and cities. I concentrated this work on Walvis Bay and Windhoek, where most of them lived. I met 56 of them, visited them in their households (or sometimes at work) and interviewed them systematically. I asked them questions about their household composition, migration histories and their support relations with the rural household and with other persons. This multisite approach enabled me to match and compare their answers with the results of the research I conducted in the rural areas.

Households in the urban areas proved to be more diverse than those in the rural setting. Many migrants were married, living with their families in their own or in rented houses. Another typical pattern was that of younger migrants sharing hous-

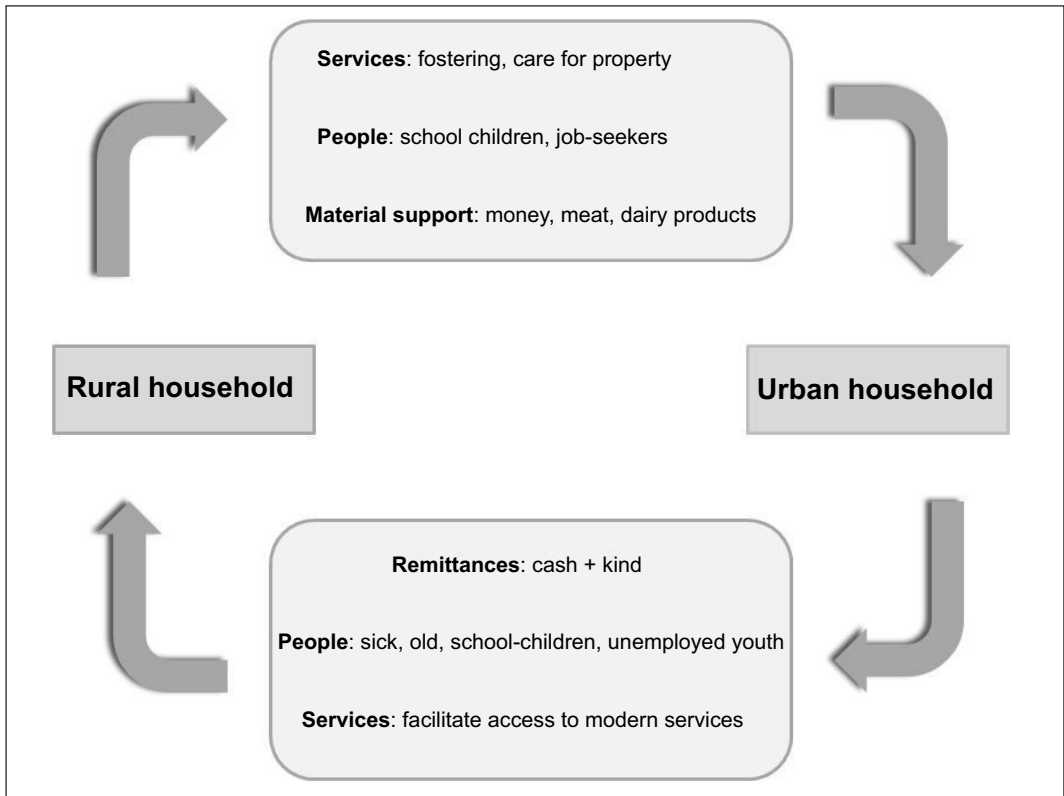


Fig. 2 General pattern of rural-urban resource transfers in Namibia (author's design) / *Generelles Muster der Übermittlung unterschiedlicher Ressourcen zwischen Land und Stadt in Namibia (Graphik: Autor)*

es that were left to them by older family members who had migrated back to the rural area. Virtually all the people I interviewed in urban areas had ongoing exchange relations with their parental or grandparental households in the Fransfontein area (for the methodological challenges of this approach see Greiner 2008; 2009).

2.2 Remittances and rural-urban transfers: general characteristics

Resource flows from urban to rural areas (henceforth referred to as remittances) are basically made up of cash and kind on roughly

equal terms. In most cases, only small amounts of money are transferred, once or twice a year. Like remittances in kind, they are mostly sent through informal networks of relatives travelling to the area or during the senders' visits back home. In some cases larger sums are sent on a regular basis, mostly through bank transfers. Remittances in kind usually comprise groceries, such as rice, maize meal, sugar, tea or canned food, as well as household goods and items related to livestock production; things that are cheaper and easier to come by in urban areas.

Meat and homemade dairy products are the main products that rural households provide for their

relatives living in urban areas. Some of the more affluent households also send money, usually made through the sale of cattle on local markets, to help out urban relatives in need and to cover school fees. Non-material support provided by rural households includes services such as child fostering and caring for sick, disabled or ageing relatives. In addition, the farm dwellers care for the rural family property and look after the livestock, which partly belongs to or will be inherited by the urban-based children. *Figure 2* summarises these dynamics.

A closer look at individual exchange relations reveals notable gender and age patterns. Remittances sent by female migrants clearly predominate in frequency as well as in terms of absolute value (see *Tab. 2*). With regard to rural-to-urban transfers, the gendered patterns are similar. 44 per cent of daughters receive support from their rural-based parents as compared to 33 per cent of sons. While the withdrawal of men from family support relations has been observed in other African societies (*Schäfer 2004: 7f.*), the current pattern can partly be explained by remittances sent by urban-based single mothers to support the foster parents of their children. Lower wages and higher unemployment of women in the urban labour market and therefore a greater need for support can partly explain the higher number of daughters being supported by their rural parents.

As far as the age patterns are concerned, there is clear evidence that older urbanites send more remittances than younger ones (*Tab. 3*). Two main factors account for this pattern: Firstly, many elders plan to return to the rural areas upon retirement. Having already built up property on the farm, they are forced to invest in local social relations to facilitate their return. Secondly, unemployment is higher among the young, and older people usually have better and more stable incomes which allow them to provide support. Rural-urban transfers, however, are predominantly directed at younger relatives, particularly at those who are at school, attend university or are temporarily unemployed³.

Finally, the truly multi-spatial character of these support networks needs to be emphasised. Residents of rural households are usually connected to relatives and friends in several urban households in towns and cities with which they have support relations. Taking only material support relations with children and grandchildren, which pertains to 45 rural households in my sample, each of these households is connected to an average of 4 persons in 2.9 distinct areas (predominantly urban). It also is important to note that most rural households in the Fransfontein area have extensive sharing and support relations with other rural households (*Schnegg 2006*), some of which are kin-based, and some of which are within the neighbourhood. Many urbanites are

Tab. 2 Extent and volume of intergenerational transfers: sons and daughters (15 years and older) supporting, or being supported by, their rural-based parents (N\$ = Namibian Dollar)

Verbreitung und Umfang des intergenerationalen Mitteltransfers von bzw. an Söhne und Töchter (15 Jahre und älter) der Eltern im ländlichen Raum (N\$ = Namibia-Dollar)

Direction of transfer		Sons (N = 121)	Daughters (N = 125)
Urban → Rural	support to rural-based parents	37 %	47 %
	N\$ per year (median)	510	750
Rural → Urban	supported by rural-based parents	33 %	44 %
	N\$ per year (median)	400	450

Tab. 3 Transfer relations between urban-based sons and daughters (15 years and older) and their rural-based parents, by age groups / *Transferbeziehungen zwischen Söhnen und Töchtern (15 Jahre und älter) in der Stadt und ihren Eltern auf dem Land, nach Altersgruppen*

Age cluster	Sons and daughters (N)	Support to farm (in %)	Support from farm (in %)
15-24	29	14	45
25-34	77	40	36
35-44	67	58	39
45-54	40	58	35

connected to more than one rural household. This is particularly the case with married couples, who are obliged to support both partners' parental households. Furthermore, there are support relations and a high degree of mobility between the urban households. School children and job-seekers, for example, are often sent to households of relatives who offer to sustain them temporarily. This means that there is a complex set of exchange and support relations which is not confined to individual out-migrants and their households of origin. Based on these data, how would one meaningfully isolate a multilocal household? Whom to include, whom not? In the following description I will concentrate on intergenerational support relations and their impact on rural and urban households.

2.3 *The impact of remittances and transfer networks on households*

About 80 per cent of the households surveyed in the rural areas receive remittances (N = 74), mostly from children and grandchildren (about 74 %). These remittances in cash and kind make up about 20 per cent of the average per-capita household income (median). This figure conceals some notable differences associated with gender, age and socioeconomic position of the household, specifically with respect to the household head. These patterns also correlate at least partly

with the public welfare system, notably the contribution-free old-age pensions to which every Namibian citizen aged 60 or older is entitled.

Female-headed households, which according to my survey results make up about a third of all households in the rural research area, receive significantly higher remittances than male-headed households. This is especially true for households headed by women aged 60 or older. Most of these women are widowed, which means that their household receives only one old-age pension. Most male household heads within this age bracket are married, and their households therefore usually receive two pensions. The average per capita size of male- and female-headed households, however, is roughly the same (about 3.5 residents). Remittances therefore help to reduce structural inequalities endemic to the public welfare system.

With regard to the age patterns, the share of remittances within the income bundle is often higher in households whose heads are less than 60 years of age and therefore not entitled to a pension. Due to a lack of alternative rural income possibilities, some of these households depend almost entirely on the remittances sent by their urban-based kin. These households usually belong to the lowest socioeconomic strata.

Concerning the welfare aspect of remittances, it can be concluded that in poorer and structurally

disadvantaged households remittances account for a relatively higher percentage of the overall income than they do in more affluent households. On the other hand, the total value of the remittances received by a given household usually rises with its per capita income. The share of remittances in the income bundles of rich households, particularly in those with large amounts of livestock, is usually relatively low. These households mostly rely on diversified incomes, partly because they have access to the few well-paid government jobs in the area. Still, the absolute monetary value of remittances received by these households is significantly higher than that received by poorer ones. Remittances thus display a double-edged character: They clearly alleviate gender- and age-specific poverty, but they also further the already pronounced socioeconomic stratification. Elsewhere, I dwell on these stratifying dynamics in more detail (Greiner 2011).

Urban-based households also benefit from their connections to the rural areas. As outlined above, they receive meat and dairy products, which are highly valued but much more expensive in urban areas. Most rural support is directed to female migrants and younger family members. This is due to their lower socioeconomic positions and the gender inequalities in urban job markets. Other studies from Namibia and southern Africa even note that food transfers from the rural areas are critical to the survival of urban households (Potts 1997; Frayne 2005). According to my data, however, services provided by the rural households, such as child fostering and care of the sick, are more important. They alleviate the financial burden on those living in town, where the cost of living are higher than in the rural areas.

Finally, the rural areas provide a safe home for those older urbanites who retire from their jobs. By maintaining access to the rural household, the migrants reduce risks associated with urban life (see Gelderblom 2007: 252 for a similar observation in South Africa). For the rural families, on

the other hand, their urban-based relatives provide a “bridgehead to the outside world” (Geschiere and Gugler 1998: 310). They take in new migrants coming to the cities in search of work or to attend school, and they are addressed by their relatives and friends from the country when they have to use urban-based services like hospitals or government agencies.

3. Discussion: Can Households be Multilocal?

From the results outlined above it becomes clear that in order to fully understand the differentiated networks involved in the space-livelihood conditions of a country like Namibia as well as the impacts of remittances and rural-urban networks it is important to look at individual household and migrant characteristics. I now turn to the question of how to understand and analyse the role of the household in these processes.

Dynamics similar to those sketched above have been observed in many other developing countries, particularly in Africa (Francis 2002) and Asia (e.g. Thieme and Wyss 2005; Sakdapolrak 2008; Deshingkar and Farrington 2009). Terms such as ‘split households’ (Frayne and Pendleton 2001), ‘multiple home households’ (Smit 1998), ‘dual-households’ (Adepoju 1995) or ‘multilocal households’ (Lohnert 2002; Schmidt-Kallert and Kreibich 2004; Schmidt-Kallert 2009) and ‘translocal households’ (Steinbrink 2009; 2010) were coined to describe the phenomenon of informal rural-urban exchange. These terms represent a notion of two or more spatially dispersed residential units, united in joint decision-making under the imaginary roof of one single household. For convenience, I will lump these approaches together and refer to them as the ‘multilocal household’ concept henceforth. The idea of a household being multilocal might well serve a descriptive purpose, but when examined carefully it turns out to be a rather fuzzy concept.

I surmise that the idea of ‘multilocal households’ refers to spatially fragmented family or kinship networks, i.e. to a group of people related by economic, emotional, moral etc. ties connecting them, rather than to households as domestic units. Households as domestic units can be defined according to different criteria, such as whether certain persons sleep or eat in a specific spatial location, or whether these persons make economic contributions to the household (*Sanjek* 2004). To be sure, there is ‘no single universal function or activity’ of households (*Wilk and Miller* 1997) and it sometimes proves difficult to use the household as a meaningful unit of analysis. There are well-known studies by scholars such as *Carol Stack* (1975) or *Sally Findley* (1987; 1997) that have deliberately and explicitly chosen not to use the household as a unit of analysis, but to focus instead on family and kinship networks⁴. But why lump together apples and oranges? Why use the concept of household when actually talking about exchange networks? I argue that increased terminological clarity would be helpful in these cases.

I do not want to reopen the debates on how to define households, an issue that has been substantially dealt with in the literature (see for example *Yanagisako* 1979; *Netting* et al. 1984), but simply to highlight one lesson learned from these debates: Family and kinship structure should be analytically separated from the household as a domestic unit (*Wilk and Netting* 1984; *Sanjek* 2004). Of course, households can be linked by friendship, kinship, exchange, working relations etc., but this connectedness alone is not sufficient to allow us to lump all residential units that somehow cooperate together into one single household. “After all, we do not speak of a single household when two families that live and work separately within a village regularly exchange goods or help each other work” (*Greiner and Schnegg* 2009: 255).

For practical reasons, I suggest that we retain the concept of the household as a discrete, place-

based residential unit. Thereby, for the purposes of census counting, every person can be taken to primarily belong to one such unit only (*van de Walle* 2006; *Greiner and Schnegg* 2009). Yet the solution to the issue of household membership needs to be further differentiated. *Wilk and Miller* (1997), for example, argue that assuming discrete membership in contexts of high mobility leads to problematic results (see also *Randall* et al. 2011). They suggest the introduction of such categories as full-time residents, part-time residents, absent members and visitors into census questionnaires. In my Namibian research, I have used the concept of de-jure members to take into account people that are absent but can claim the right of membership.

These approaches distinguish those that habitually live in a household from those that are more or less loosely affiliated. This allows the concept of the household to be kept as a census unit, but also acknowledges the connections (weak or strong) between this unit and other individuals conceived of as belonging to it. The notion of ‘multilocal households’ does not allow for this differentiation; here, all persons belonging to a given group of reference (usually the extended family), be they absent or not, are indiscriminately taken to be members. This, however, is merely a theoretical construct, at least with reference to rural-urban migration in Namibia. Unless one considers children sent to boarding schools, virtually all people who move from rural to urban areas join an urban household, or else create their own, such as the examples in *Box 1* demonstrate. These households again have specific sets of exchange relations with other households (as do the rural households), which I have described in detail above. Given the resulting multiplicity of connections between rural and urban households (and rural-rural and urban-urban exchange relations, for that matter), it is an extraordinarily difficult task to delimit units of analysis in a meaningful manner. Where, then, should a multilocal household begin, and where should

it end? Who exactly should be considered as a member and who should be excluded? Who is taking which decisions for whom?

This is not to deny that there are social settings where the notion of ‘multilocal households’ in a stricter sense can be applied. Take, for example, some pastoralist groups in East Africa, such as the Maasai or the Pokot. In these societies, polygynous household heads either stay with one of their wives or frequently move between the different sub-households of their wives. Of course, it is also possible to address and enumerate these sub-households. For surveys, then, it is of the utmost importance to classify a given household properly (e.g. asking about other sub-households with co-wives) and to carefully establish its connectedness and affiliation with other (sub-)households. But such sub-households are mere components, related to an overarching household (more closely correlated with the abstract conceptual unit, which may also be less spatially localised) with a head who is intrinsically involved in decision-making regarding, for example, livestock rearing or crop cultivation. The individual sub-households (or satellites for that matter) are often spatially distributed in such a manner as to make use of different ecological niches for grazing or cultivation. In the case of the Maasai, male household heads also start building their own houses in more urban areas. In my view, these social practices, which very much resemble the rural-urban livelihoods discussed in this contribution, reveal the true meaning of multilocal households (sources: For the Pokot: own research, for the Maasai cf. *Homewood et al.* 2009).

With regard to current rural-urban migration, these examples represent rather special cases. Numerous contributions from Africa, such as *Dolores Koenig’s* (2005) analysis of multilocality and social stratification, *Joseph Gugler’s* (1996) notion of ‘one family – two households’, *Ross and Weisner’s* (1977) analysis of migrant

networks or *Foeken and Owuor’s* (2001) work on ‘multi-spatial-livelihoods’, as well as the Namibian case outlined above, suggest that it is perfectly feasible to distinguish between rural and urban households. They might be intimately connected by an exchange of goods, persons and services, but still they should be conceived as ‘stand-alone’ households with their own multi-dimensional connections. One should, therefore, talk about exchange or support networks between households instead of lumping them together, rendering them indistinguishable. In short: Livelihood strategies can be multilocal, households usually are not.

Once one accepts this perspective, support and exchange between households as well as their degree of interconnectedness can be analysed with methodological tools such as social network analysis (*Schnegg* 2008) or household surveys. These latter are also better suited to comparisons through space and time, as most official censuses and surveys use a similar concept of the household (*van de Walle* 2006). Characteristics of the different households can be elucidated, and specific issues, such as the benefits and drawbacks for different households in rural and urban areas, can be assessed. For example, are rural-urban relations always beneficial? Are some households advantaged while others invest more than they gain from these relations? Are there gendered or other differences in migration and support networks regarding individual de-jure or absent members? This again might offer clues to the crucial question of why and when rural-urban support relations are created and when and under what conditions they dissolve.

4. Conclusion: Towards a Translocal Livelihoods Perspective

The examination of the case of Kunene South shows that rural-urban networks may provide social security and help to minimise risks but

also promote socioeconomic stratification (Greiner 2011). The differentiated effects and the full impact of these dynamics can only be assessed and understood if a concept of the household is used that provides discrete and measurable criteria. Given the importance of rural-urban networks for scholarly and development studies, it is important to use concepts that make data comparable and cross-culturally accessible. The household, despite all the difficulties attached to its definition and demarcation, is such a concept. It is used in national censuses and household surveys, which for many developing countries provide the only demographic information accessible, doubtful and imperfect as it may be sometimes.

But how, then, can one address the specific interactions between households connected by migration? I suggest calling these phenomena ‘translocal livelihood strategies’ (Greiner 2010; see also Steinbrink 2009), where livelihoods refers to the sustainable livelihood concept (Bohle 2009) and the term ‘translocal’ (adapted from Appadurai 1995; and Guarnizo and Smith 1998) points to its spatial dimensions. The dynamics described with this term transgress (Oßenbrügge 2004) the limits of purely local forms of exchange and livelihood creation. They are not limited to rural-urban migration and exchange; similar dynamics can also be found in international migration (e.g. Massey et al. 2005). Translocality can be defined as “the emergence of multidirectional and overlapping networks created by migration that facilitate the circulation of resources, practices and ideas and thereby transform the particular localities they connect” (Greiner 2011: 610). Translocal livelihood strategies can be pursued by units of different scale: by individuals, households, villages or even regions (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2012). Yet, processes of exchange and support are embedded in networks and should be analysed with the appropriate methodological tools.

Notes

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² Survey and census data of the rural area presented here were collected between September and November 2005. They represent a complete census of all 100 households residing in 10 rural settlements in the Fransfontein communal area (323 persons). The area of the complete census was chosen based on historical facts, which to outline here would be beyond the scope of this paper. In what follows, however, households of immigrant herders and their families (26 households/66 persons), who work for the richer households in the area, are excluded in these figures. They usually in-migrate from northern regions of the country, and in some fewer cases from southern Angolan territories, often on a short-term basis, though some also stay for good. During the time of the survey, immigrant herders and their families made up about 20 per cent of the farm population.

³ The number of rural-to-urban supports to young relatives is actually higher than in *Table 3*, because under-15-year-old sons and daughters are not represented in the table.

⁴ Of course it is also possible to analyse the household itself as a networked structure, for example to analyse and model budget structures and power relations with the domestic unit (*Wilk 1994*).

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Summary: Can Households be Multilocal? Conceptual and Methodological Considerations based on a Namibian Case Study

Defining 'the household' is a difficult analytical task, which becomes even more challenging in instances of high mobility of individual household members. Often the notion of 'multilocal households' is used to describe the resulting, spatially dispersed, residential units. This contribution illustrates how the reliance on such a notion is largely imprecise and argues that, in turn, methodological and conceptual alternatives need to be explored which keep the household as an effective unit of analysis within migration studies. To illustrate this argument, a case study on migration and rural-urban exchange networks from Namibia is discussed. Here, Apartheid and the contract labour regime have created a system of cyclical (return) migration that continues to have a profound effect on family structures and household compositions to the present day. This case study makes evident, for a number of reasons, that a precise definition of the household is needed in order to fully understand the dimensions and complexities of rural-urban migration and support relations. First, important peculiarities of support relations are not likely to be disentangled if the notion of a 'multilocal household' is super-

imposed over sets of relationships between rural and urban units. Secondly, it is demonstrated that it is almost impossible to isolate 'multilocal households' as meaningful social units, given the diversity of rural-urban (and rural-rural/urban-urban) relationships. Thirdly, it is evident that individuals build up or attach themselves to various households during the course of their lives. Based on these insights and an overview over the multi-site ethnographical approach that was used to gather systematic data, the subsequent discussion addresses the notion of 'multilocal households'. It argues that for many settings the concept is misleading and analytically fuzzy, because it fails to distinguish kinship-based networks and households. As an alternative approach the concept of translocal livelihoods is introduced.

Zusammenfassung: Können Haushalte multilokal sein? Konzeptionelle und methodologische Überlegungen auf der Basis einer Fallstudie aus Namibia

Die Definition von „Haushalt“ ist stets eine analytische Herausforderung, die im Kontext hoher individueller Mobilität einzelner Haushaltsmitglieder erschwert wird. Oftmals wird der Begriff des „multilokalen Haushalts“ verwendet, um die daraus resultierenden verbundenen, aber räumlich verteilten Wohneinheiten zu beschreiben. Dieser Beitrag zeigt, dass dieser Ansatz unpräzise ist, und argumentiert, dass methodische und konzeptionelle Alternativen erarbeitet werden müssen, um den Haushalt als zentrale analytische Einheit in Migrationsstudien zu erhalten. Um dieses Argument zu untermauern, greift dieser Beitrag auf eine Fallstudie zu Migration und Land-Stadt-Beziehungen in Namibia zurück, wo Apartheid und das Vertragsarbeitsregime ein System zyklischer Migrationsprozesse hinterlassen haben. Dieses prägt bis heute die Familienbeziehungen und Haushaltszusammensetzungen. Die Fallstudie verdeutlicht, dass es aus mehreren Gründen einer präzisen Haushaltsdefinition bedarf, um die vielfältigen Facetten und Komplexitäten der Land-Stadt-Migration und der daraus resultierenden Unterstützungsmerkmale zu erfassen. Erstens können wichtige Merkmale der Unterstützungsbeziehungen nur schwer erhoben werden, wenn das Konzept des

„multilokalen Haushalts“ über das Beziehungsgeflecht zwischen ländlichen und städtischen Einheiten gestülpt wird. Zweitens wird gezeigt, dass es vor dem Hintergrund des vielfältigen Land-Stadt- (und Land-Land-/Stadt-Stadt-) Beziehungsgeflechts fast unmöglich scheint, „multilokale Haushalte“ als sinnvolle soziale Einheiten zu isolieren. Drittens wird deutlich, dass Individuen sich im Laufe ihres Lebens unterschiedlichen Haushalten anschließen oder eigene Haushalte gründen. Basierend auf diesen Erkenntnissen und auf einem Überblick über die in der Datenerhebung verwendeten Methoden der systematischen Datenerhebung (u.a. *multi-sited ethnography*), wird im Diskussionsteil nochmals das Konzept des multilokalen Haushalts aufgegriffen. Dabei wird festgestellt, dass dieser Ansatz in vielen Fällen irreführend und analytisch unscharf ist, da er nicht zwischen Verwandtschaftsnetzwerken und Residenzeinheiten unterscheidet. Abschließend wird als alternativer Ansatz das Konzept der „translocal livelihoods“ vorgeschlagen.

Résumé: Les foyers peuvent-ils être à locations multiples ? Considérations conceptuelles et méthodologiques sur la base d'une étude de cas en Namibie

Définir la notion de « foyer » peut être une tâche encore plus ardue si l'on prend en considération le critère complexe de la mobilité des individus composant ce foyer. Souvent, la notion de « foyer à locations multiples » est utilisée pour décrire les unités résidentielles éclatées et dispersées qui résultent de cette mobilité. La présente contribution apporte un éclairage sur l'imprécision d'une telle définition et propose par conséquent d'explorer de nouvelles alternatives méthodologiques et conceptuelles dans lesquelles le foyer est considéré comme une unité effective d'analyse au sein des études portant sur la migration. Une étude de cas portant sur la migration rurale-urbaine en Namibie illustre cette approche. Dans le contexte de ce pays, l'Apartheid et la législation afférente aux contrats de travail ont généré un système de migration de retour cyclique dont l'impact sur les structures familiales et la composition du foyer se fait aujourd'hui encore profondément ressentir. Cette étude de cas met en évidence, pour de multiples raisons, la néces-

sité d'une définition précise de la notion de foyer afin d'être à même d'appréhender la migration rurale-urbaine et les relations de soutien qui en découlent sous tous leurs aspects et dans toute leur complexité. Tout d'abord, les particularités importantes des relations de soutien ne sont pas susceptibles d'être dissociées si la notion de « foyer à location multiple » est superposée à des ensembles de relations entre les unités urbaines et rurales. Ensuite, en raison de la diversité des relations entre monde rural et urbain (ainsi que rural-rural et urbain-urbain), il est démontré qu'il est quasiment impossible d'isoler les « foyers à locations multiples » en tant qu'unité sociale significative. Enfin, il semble évident que les individus construisent ou s'attachent à plusieurs foyers au cours de leur vie. Sur la base de ces remarques et d'un aperçu sur l'approche ethnographique multisites qui a été utilisée pour recueillir des données systématiques, la présente discussion traite de la

notion de « foyer à locations multiples ». Elle met en évidence le caractère trompeur et flou sur le plan analytique de ce concept qui ne permet pas de distinguer les réseaux de parenté et les foyers. Le concept de moyens de subsistance translocaux est introduite en tant qu'approche alternative.

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