What will the African Family be like in 20 years?

Jennifer Johnson-Hanks and Paul Chung

University of California Berkeley (USA)
“Everywhere the ideology of the conjugal family is spreading. It appeals to the disadvantaged, to the young, to women and to the educated. It promises freedom and new alternatives as against the rigidities and controls of traditional systems.”

--William Goode, 1963
“Everywhere the ideology of the conjugal family is spreading. It appeals to the disadvantaged, to the young, to women and to the educated. It promises freedom and new alternatives as against the rigidities and controls of traditional systems.”

--William Goode, 1963

Or maybe not?
Rights and obligations in kin are broadly extended, and “traditional” African family forms are highly adaptable both to historical or environmental circumstances and to personal preference.
Within “traditional” African unions and households, men and women may maintain considerable autonomy, including economic autonomy.
“Traditional” African family systems offer considerable resilience to their members in the face of unparalleled uncertainty. As family systems change, they need to maintain this flexibility.
And change is happening, although not necessarily convergence ...
Predictions

• Growing division in family forms based on class
  – More conjugal (but maintaining extended kin networks) among the elite
  – More “matrifocal”, without advantage of extended kin, among poor

• Each maintains and extends some, but not all, aspects of “traditional” family systems