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Consequences of male international migration for women's position in Senegal:
reinforcement or weakening of traditional social relationships?

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Introduction

In this study we address the issue of women “left behind” in the context of male driven South-North migration.. As shown by research on transnational relations (Brettell, 2008), to understand the impact of migration on the society of origin it is essential to consider both sides: that of migrants as well as that of non migrants.

Our study focuses on the case of Senegalese women in a small town located north-west of Dakar in a region shaped by out migration to Europe since the 1980s. Using qualitative interviews conducted in 2007, we focus on the following issues: 1) does the long lasting absence of male migrants contribute to a reconfiguration of left behind women’s roles within the household, whether they are wives, sisters or migrants’ mothers? 2) Considering the image migration and migrant families have in the small town, to what extent has this phenomenon influenced women’s aspirations and contributed to the emergence of a new model for the family and couple around which women tend to re-define their own social position?

‘Gender and migration’ : an overview of the literature

Research on the relationships between gender and migration remains scarce (Donato et al, 2006). Most recent studies deal with the ‘feminisation of migration’ although women’s migration is not a new phenomenon (Kofman et al., 2000; Pessar et Mahler, 2003). However although the feminisation of migration is increasingly documented, few studies focus on the consequences of male migration for women who, although “left behind” are nevertheless active in the migration process.

Migration can be considered as ‘gendered’ since the decision to migrate or to stay is related to individuals’ roles and social status in the society in which they are embedded (Chant, 1992; Biao, 2007). It is however crucial not to adopt a deterministic and static perspective as the dynamic nature of migration as a social phenomenon coupled with individual agency sometimes challenging social norms leads some to become vectors of social change.

International South-North migration is frequently addressed through an economic development perspective based on the financial remittances towards the society of origin. Social transformations remain poorly studied although it is a fundamental dimension of societies’ development process (Nyberg-Sorensen et al, 2002). Levitt (1998) refers to « social remittances » related to new ideas, way of life, disseminated by migration processes. Hence the importance of taking into account social relationships, including gender, in the population of origin, the local culture as well as the interface between the public and domestic spheres in order to decipher the context in which these innovations

are occurring and appropriated by individuals (Brettell, 2003 : 147-150)The effects of migration on those left behind was studied as early as the 1960s (Gonzales, 1961). In general, authors have questioned the ‘empowering’ effect of male migration on left behind women, who are assumed to experience an increase in decision making power thus contributing to transformations of gender dynamics and sexual hierarchy within the society of origin (Brettell, 2003 : 141). Most studies on this subject have focused on migrants’ wives and show that husbands’ migration has often led to the adoption of new roles by their wives compared to their traditional ones..

The sociological and anthropological perspectives on the impacts of migration on women’s status in the community of origin suggest a more nuanced picture. For rural households impacted by seasonal circular labour migration towards cities, several studies show the transformation of social practices within the rural arena. For example, Nelson (1992), studying the rural-urban migration in Kenya before the independence, suggests that the challenge for women was to make decisions during their husbands’ absence while having limited access to land. These women, who had become heads of household after their husbands’ departure, faced substantial barriers to improving the farm’s situation and consequently became extremely stressed. Their stress was reinforced by fears of husbands’ infidelity and daily tensions experienced with their family in law. Similarly, in rural Zimbabwe during the colonial period, left behind wives’ feelings of insecurity generated increasing couple instability, these sedentary wives also facing gossip related to their behaviour during their husbands’ absence (Schäfer, 2000 : 159). Therefore, the challenge for these women was to prevent potential conflicts between themselves in order to develop collaborative relationships to face economic hazards. Male migration, in this context, thus not only influenced conjugal relationships, relations within household and between rural and urban environments but also between women themselves.

On the contrary, other cases demonstrate real steps towards women’s empowerment: for example, feminisation of agriculture in Egypt supported by men massively leaving for the neighbouring Arab states (Weyland, 1993). Women who ‘stay’ became more active in the agricultural activities, wage labour, participated more in the public sphere, and, more generally, took responsibilities for maintaining discipline in the household (Brink, 1991: 201).

However, other studies conducted in Morocco (de Haas, 2010), Lebanon (Khalaf, 2009), Burkina Faso (Hampshire, 2006) and in Egypt (Hoodfar, 1996) show that changes in women’s activities during their husbands’ absence do not necessarily imply a sustained structural change in the patriarchal organization of the family and social life of the community of origin. Some studies highlight the temporary nature of changes in gender relationships related to migration and indicate that the responsibilities and power gained by women quickly disappear when their husbands come back and get back to their

traditional patriarchal role within the family and the community (Brink, 1991; de Haas, 2010).

Resurreccion and Khanh (2007) show how in Vietnam, where wives leaving for the city while husbands have to manage domestic tasks during their absence, the traditional gender roles are re-established. Other studies highlight the ambivalent effects of migration on non migrant women, showing that while men's absence is likely to imply an increase in their decision power, it also leads to increased difficulties (Khalaf, 2009) as well as social tensions (Ennaji and Sadiqi, 2009; Nelson, 1992).

Some studies have demonstrated more indirect effects on non migrant women and gender relationships. Results from recent research on women who 'stay' in the Todgha valley, a rural region in South Morocco characterized by high levels of out migration to Europe, show a slight increase in girls' enrolment in primary school in households involved in international migration (de Haas and van Rooij, 2010 : 51). In addition, migrant women seem to be indirect vectors of change in the gender dynamics in this region. During their summer visits to Todgha, these resident-in -Europe women and their daughters, often educated and relatively autonomous, often become role-models for non migrant women, thus activating a flow of 'social remittances' (Levitt, 1998), possibly contributing to the transformation of gender structures in the long term (de Haas and van Rooij, 2010 : 59).

In their multisite study in West Africa, Ba and Brédéloup (1997) already highlighted the multiple dimensions of fuitanke women's migration in Senegal: although these women's migration remains under men's control, once in their new environment, they benefit from improved living conditions which they exploit when they get back (savings, networks or opportunities they may have developed); nevertheless once back in their place of origin, they face local social constraints and becoming again largely dependent on their husbands' earnings. Women who stayed, whether migrants' wives or not, managed to get involved in local life, for example by participating in development programs launched by international organisations. Thus the authors argue that more than international migration, it is the contact with an external environment that can lead to a change in gender relationships (Ba and Bredeloup, 1997 : 85).

In the contemporary Seneglaese contexts it is thus essential to consider left behind women's situation in the context of their social and cultural environment shaped by important social changes related to the increase in schooling and the greater access to information.

'Gender and migration' in Senegal : elements of context

Senegalese migration has been described extensively elsewhere¹. Here we specifically address women's situation in Senegalese society and their relationship to migration.

Being a woman in Senegal

According to Dial (2008 : 15), « In Senegal, tradition and then the Muslim culture have perpetuated a system of inequality and sexual domination which are justified by their 'nature', tradition and religion » [our translation] In particular, Wolof social norms, -e Wolof being the majority group in Senegal- set the man as head of the household and require that women remain subjected to him. Women's inferior position is reinforced by patrilocal norms requiring that the wife joins her husband's home, often co-residing with her family in law and co-wives. Men are obliged to provide economic support for their family and wives.

These powerful Wolof social norms reinforce the importance of marriage as it structures the relations within the couple following these principles. However, marital relationships are being shaken by broader social changes related to economic crisis, urbanisation, girls' increased school enrolment which are contributing to modifications of the family and intergenerational relationships which are at the core of the social organisation of most African societies (Vignikin, 2007). Marriage, conjugal relationships and divorce thus constitute interesting 'proxies' for analysing women's position in Senegalese society and the changing relations between men and women (Antoine et al, 1998; Antoine, 2002; Antoine and Dial, 2005; Dial, 2008). To what extent does migration, both the result and the vector of socioeconomic transformations, affect marriages and their stability?

Women and migration in Senegal

The strength and dynamism of Senegalese female migration should not be underestimated. Although relatively few women currently participate in the international migration flow, their number is increasing. At the same time, studies are multiplying, attempting to capture a phenomenon for which data remains scarce. Sakho et al (2011) suggest the reasons for the lack of visibility of female migration can be found in the stereotypes of the woman traditionally considered as economically inactive and dependent on men; this perspective is shared by Ba and Brédeloup (1997) who argue that African female migration remained under studied until the early 1990s. However, women are far from being absent from international migration flows, including to Northern countries. Hence, Ba (2008: 389) studies the case of Mourid women in New York, insisting that for these women, migrating is associated with economic enterprise rather than following or joining their husband or a relative. These very dynamic women could

¹ See Diop (2008); about Senegalese migration in Italy see Riccio 2006; also see the MAFE (Migration between Africa and Europe) project web site (<http://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/>); also Mondain and Diagne, 2010 (<http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk/pdfs/african-migrations-workshops/ceux-et-celles-qui-restent>)

be perceived by their peers as models of success in their community of origin (Ba, 2008 : 390). In addition, such Senegalese women in the public sphere find themselves at the core of tensions and negotiations within their own environment where men often stigmatise them using a language of morality in order to try and retain a semblance of control. How are these transformations affecting left behind women through transnational relations or through returning migrants?

It is important to consider local contexts within the country as the gender and intergenerational relationships may differ. For example, in the Senegal River valley, an area shaped by migration for decades, men's absence does not mean that wives become heads of the household; the management of the family budget remains in the hands of the migrant's mother or his brothers. Such situations seem to lead to an increase in conflicts between spouses and within households, likely to lead to divorce, often initiated by women (Tall and Tandian, 2010). Such responses related to wives' frustration can be interpreted as the expression of new aspirations leading women to question the social norms forcing them to adopt an attitude of patience and acceptance in their conjugal lives.

These issues are related to the access to financial resources and crystallise in the active role played by women in the decision to migrate and the financial support provided, especially in the case of mothers and their oldest son (Sakho and Dial, 2010). Moreover, an increasing number of women have started to participate in illegal migration in order to improve their own parents' life conditions or to support the family they are responsible for; although there is a general silence around illegal migration experiences, women's accounts are even more absent since Senegalese social norms tend to stigmatise female migration in general (Sakho and Dial, 2010).

The case study

Our case study concerns a small town of approximately 16,000 inhabitants and where male out migration to Italy has occurred since the late 1980s. Agricultural activities have become marginal in this area, whereas businesses have multiplied. This international migration is essentially circular and migrants, once their legal and job situation has stabilised in Italy, come back regularly to their home town, each year if possible, for several weeks. Their visits provide opportunities for them to extend their families, taking an additional wife, having more children or start building a family house, often a luxurious villa which symbolises their financial and social success. Most of these migrants intend to return definitively to Senegal once their objectives met (ensuring that they can support their families) and expect that the next generation will take over.

This largely Wolof community epitomises Wolof patriarchal and patrilocal social and cultural norms. Many people adhere to the Murid or Tidjan brotherhoods, where men

and women's roles are precisely circumscribed, the latter in the domestic sphere and reproduction, the former as family support and bread winners. Geographical proximity to Touba, the pilgrim Senegalese city is obvious through the number of mosques, and coranic schools and local discourse is full of moralistic and religious overtones. This context is thus likely to maintain hierarchical social relationships favouring men and the elderly, these relationships being particularly easy to maintain as the extended families live together in large compounds. As a result, addressing the issue of women's empowerment implies to take into account household structure and the fact that any married woman is supposed to join her husband's home where, in most cases, his family gathers.

In order to examine the consequences of international male out migration in Senegal for women left behind in the community of origin, we use qualitative interviews conducted in 2007 among 85 men and women aged 18 to 69. Here we mainly use the interviews conducted with women, differentiated according to their relationship to a migrant (table 1)² to explore the following themes: the perceptions of the advantages and drawbacks of migration, the relationships between spouses, motivations for marriage, post-marital residence, education, domestic work and economic issues.

Table 1

Distribution of women according to their relation with one or several migrants and by marital status and age

	No migrant	Migrant wife	Migrant close family	Migrant distant family	Has migrated
Marital status	(8M, 1D, 1W)	(7M, 2D)	(5M, 4S, 1D, 4W)	(5M, 1S)	(1M 1D)
Age	19-60	24-44	18-65	23-56	30-34
Total	10	9	14	6	2

Note : M = married; D = divorced; W = widow; S = single

Migrant wives : managing the absence

Whether married to a migrant or not, all interviewed women outlined two main types of difficulties for migrant wives: facing the daily constraints alone without being able to share their preoccupations directly with their husband, and the relationships with the family in law, usually full of tensions, being exacerbated by the absence of their husband.

² Our knowledge of this qualitative database allows us to include, when necessary, men's perspectives.

In both cases, tensions crystallise around the access to resources highlighting women's dependence on husbands when it comes to daily expenses. In general, in this context structured around the extended family, the remittances sent by the migrant first go to the close kin (parents or any 'legitimate' household head such as a brother or even nephew) and rarely to the wife (Tall and Tandian, 2010).

The perception of the migrants who become rich and support their family is so strong within the community that their wives are widely envied and considered as free from financial worries or at least in a much better situation than other women. However, the reality described by several women contradicts this perception.

...They [migrants' wives] have problems because people think you have everything. People often lecture you and you have no-one to turn to when you have problems because they say that your husband has emigrated. You just have to sort things out yourself and put up with any problems. People say that your husband sends this and sends that, whereas in fact it's not the case. When you have your husband by your side you can always lean on him in case of need. If your husband is late sending money you can't ask anyone else to help you. And if you do turn towards someone else you are slandered. People think that when we are sent money we waste it (aged 43, migrant's wife, no schooling, 4 children).

I'm never going to marry a migrant again. Migrants don't provide support for anyone, I mean to say their wives. They give nothing to their wives. All my friends have got migrant husbands. They don't take care of anyone and they give nothing to their wives. (aged 31, divorced, ex-wife of migrant, no children, hairdresser)

Migrant wives can nevertheless obtain credit with shop keepers who know they can always turn to the husband when he gets back. Most women, whatever their relationship with a migrant, identify themselves as 'housewives', although the majority, in fact, get by investing in a variety of small businesses, marketing, hairdressing or dressmaking.

Thus a contradictory view of migrant wives emerges, from the well off wife without few economic worries to the wife who has nothing and spends her time almost begging. The reality is between these two descriptions suggests how isolated these women are during their husbands' absence.

These long lasting absences, which are a source of conflicts and misunderstandings, appear to contribute to increasing marital instability. Among the reasons for their discontent and well beyond migrants' financial neglect of them, migrant wives also

mention that their husbands end up not giving her any news after a while abroad. Hence, the woman who already feels isolated within her family in law and in the community (because of the perceptions described above and also because of gossip about her behaviour) no longer sees any purpose in maintaining a relationship whose concrete dimensions have disappeared.

I: so you don't want a husband who travels a lot?

R: No, I don't want a migrant husband or if I do I would like to go with him. I don't want my husband to leave me here for 2 years. I don't want that.

I: why don't you want your husband to stay a long time without seeing you?

R: because it's hard. You see migrants' wives whose husbands have been away for 4 or 5 years. They just communicate by phone – they can't live together. (aged 23, unmarried, completed primary school, migrant uncle)

However, it is not the absence per se which is most problematic. In this society where polygamy is very common and where both men and women are locally mobile, women are brought up with the idea that their conjugal life will be structured around their husband's visits rather than around a constant presence. What women in our sample wanted was a minimum of contact and enough communication between spouses in order to solve the problems that will inevitably arise during their relationship.

Me, I want a husband who is not a migrant, and like that he can come every weekend so that I can see him. Husbands and wives should see each other regularly. It's essential to see each other even if he doesn't give you any money. The wife can at least bear the lack of money with understanding. Because at the beginning you knew that your husband was poor but you accepted him like that. (aged 31, divorced, ex-wife of migrant, no children, hairdresser)

No, I don't mind if he's a migrant or not. I just want a husband who has compassionⁱ for me and who can look after me. Someone who will be able to understand me. That's the type of man I want and I can't say whether he'll be a migrant or not. And even if I said that I don't want a migrant, I could have a husband who is there and then migrates a short time afterwards. Because in this town nothing is certain and anyway it's a town of migrants. (aged 34, unmarried, secondary schooling, migrant brothers).

Another major cause of conflicts likely to lead to separation relates to tensions within the family in law, most often with the mother and sisters in law. These tensions are not restricted to migrant wives; they affect all married women, especially in polygamous unions where co-wives tend to be in competition with each other. However these tensions are exacerbated when the wife is left alone and cannot turn towards her husband as a witness of unjust behaviours against her.

I: why did you just say that migration is bad?

R: because if he had stayed for a long time with me he would have known my true personality so that they don't gang up against me. I had problems but I managed to solve them myself, alone. Before I left him I stayed there for a year and he sent me no money. It's my older sister in Italy who sent me money to support me. She was the only person who knew what I was living through in my married household. In fact she advised me to say nothing to my parents. (Aged 26, ex-migrant husband, divorced, Primary school, no children)

These tensions are also related to suspicions surrounding migrant wives' behaviours and morality as they are perceived as likely to be tempted by adultery because of their husbands' prolonged absences. As a result a climate of surveillance within the family in law develops which ends up in fights and arguments.

However, the situation of daughters in law whether migrant wives or not is often difficult as shown in other studies (Dial, 2008) and as suggested below:

For example, if there are two daughters in law whose husbands have emigrated and the third daughter in law whose husband is there [exactly her situation] they let off all the bad things, all the bad gossip onto the wife of the non-migrant (aged 30, primary, husband's brother is migrant)

It is thus difficult to conclude to what extent it is migration and the husband's absence which are sources of tensions and contribute to the instability of unions; however it is likely that they exacerbates an already tense situation.

The other domain where migration is likely to contribute to the modification of women's priorities while constituting a potential source of tensions relates to reproduction. Long absences and short visits have an impact on fertility. Fertility remains high in the small town³ and childbearing constitutes an essential dimension of femininity and women's status (Foley, 2007). Having many children reinforces the woman's position within the family and provides her with respect and admiration, which, in this context, goes with the idea that the woman belongs to the domestic and reproductive sphere. Such a perspective

³ The chief doctor told us that contraceptive use in the small town was lower than 10%.

seems to contradict new ambitions in terms of education, labour market participation as well as choosing one's spouse. By its 'mechanical' effect on fertility, migration is likely to reinforce either the traditional values related to high fertility with all the stigma infertile women face and thus becoming marginalised within their conjugal household, or to lead to a lower fertility regime where women can develop new roles outside the family.

In such a context what are the fault lines that emerge through which women are able to find some autonomy? In fact the subjects on which younger generations express their personal aspirations are not new: for example, most young women reject polygamy even if they admit they would accept it if they were faced with it. Such attitudes are found among older women as well; however, it is likely that changes regarding marriage arrangements might be encouraged by migrant wives' discontent about their own situations.

The cases of women who have divorced, women who are still married but who openly talk about their difficulties can be interpreted as the expression of specific aspirations in the sense that all these experiences and discourses contradict the conventional ones specifying women's submission, patience, who should do 'mougn'⁴ in order to accept and face the difficulties of conjugal life and separation due to the husband's absences. These absences, aggravated by distance create extremely difficult situations leading to conflicts and sometimes separations. As a result, an increasingly negative image of the migrants emerges in the community and seems to contribute to young women's aspirations towards new ideals of conjugal life.

Mothers : main beneficiaries of men's migration?

Mothers' discourses on migration and migrants differ from those of migrant wives, as mothers insist on the advantages of migration in that it allows them to live out their old age in good conditions, provided that their son has 'succeeded' in his migration project.

R : ..It's my oldest son who has emigrated to Italy

I: Has the fact that he emigrated changed anything in the family ?

R: No, there's no change. He left because he wanted to have something, something to support us and his children.

I : Does he help you ?

R Ah yes : he's the one who sends all the money for the daily expenditure.

I Is he the only one to help you ?

⁴ 'Mougn' refers to the attitudes expected from women in their daily lives, in particular within their marital relationships : being patient, accept situations and wait till these improve, not protesting or arguing.

R. Yes he's the only one. He's my oldest son. There's only he who looks after the house. (60 year old widow, no education, migrant son)

Many older mothers spontaneously (unprompted by the interviewer) say that their sons take good care of their wives. Does this reflect their awareness of the negative perceptions the people in the community have about migrants' behaviour towards their wives as well as the image mothers in law have as tension-makers? The following case described by a mother is of particular interest as she is lamenting the situation of her own daughter, married to a migrant. However the mother seems a bit uncomfortable when she describes her relations with her own daughter in law:

I : Your daughter, what caused the problems with her mother in law?

R: Lots of causes because her husband is a migrant and it's his mother who manages all the household expenditure. My daughter has no control over spending or of the management of the house. Often she (the mother in law) calls her all the names under the sun or, when my daughter is ill she doesn't even look after her. In the end my daughter got fed up and asked her husband to give her a divorce.

I: And you, what does your son send you in terms of money? Is it you who manages it?

R. What should pass through them passes through me because my son said " what I am sending you must spend so much on this and that". I just do what my son tells me. And when it's buying bread and food it's his wife who manages that. (aged 44, wife and mother of migrants, no education)

It is also through the analysis of mothers' discourses (as well as women who talk about their sisters) that the existence of migrant women appears. Unfortunately these cases are not described in detail but it seems that these women are not necessarily migrating within a family reunification program. However, the two female respondents who had migrated do not express a clear motivation to invest abroad; they seem to have been influenced by migrant family members to migrate themselves.

I: What pushed you to migrate?

R: the first time I went my husband was there. He used to get home late and the work was hard. When he started at 8:00am he finished at 8:00pm. So I had to help him. I came to be next to him, to help him and cook for him. That was one of the reasons I didn't start work quickly. And when I came back here with my children it was he who called me back to I could join him again.

This woman joined her husband in Italy in order to help him by taking care of the domestic tasks; the European labour market context made her professional integration difficult, especially with young children. This led her to go back to Senegal; what is interesting here is that once her children were older, she decided herself to go back to Italy, under the 'protection' of her migrant brother, in order to work during the summer season. Such complex trajectories show how women are torn between their own personal aspirations and social norms which force them to respect a certain hierarchy between the sexes restricting their ability to do what they want.

The other woman was married to a French man, and thus obtained a French passport which allowed her to circulate freely between the two continents. It is not clear to what extent this was a deliberate strategy or if she took the opportunity later to develop her own business. In any case, these situations highlight that women whether they really want to migrate or not, do not have the same autonomy as men to decide to migrate, especially given the stigma often attached to migrant women. In fact most men clearly affirm their opposition to women's migration and it is thus possible that migrant women are under-represented in our sampling as individuals felt more inclined to talk about migrant men, sons, brothers, uncles or nephews than women.

The benefits of migration fade away in women's discourses as their relationship with a migrant becomes more distant. This seems to confirm what the literature has shown elsewhere: remittances are concentrated in the hands of close family, parents, brothers and sisters, wives and children. It also suggests that the perception of African societies shaped by norms of solidarity, and the 'traditional African extended family might be false as the society is undergoing substantial social changes (Marie, 2007).

In general most women rely on their children for support in old age because of the current economic difficulties, migration is perceived as the most efficient solution. However, some dissident voices emerge with mothers willing to see the amount of money mobilised for young men's migration project invested in local economic activities instead. By expressing these hopes, migrant mothers not only emphasize the wish to keep their family and children around, but may also reflect the end of the myth surrounding migration and migrants behind which migrants' difficult life conditions were hidden. More than a view restricted to their own condition, their perspective cast a look on the community's and society's future.

Left behind women's aspirations : is there a link with migration?

Women's aspirations in this particular context are shaped by the social and economic crisis that has been ongoing for decades in Senegal. In this regard it is likely that what could be formulated as 'new' aspirations, are in fact rather old, the new dimension being that women can now articulate their aspirations more openly as shown here

I : Have you already worked?

R: I used to do sewing

I: Have you continued to do that until now ?

R: No I sell palm oil and peanut butter at home

I: Is that important for you ?

R: It's important because a woman cannot expect everything from her husband. It's important to have your own business. I don't want to expect everything from my husband. There are those who do that but I'm against it. (aged 44, no schooling, husband and son migrants)

Three main domains where women clearly express their expectations and hope emerge: 1) the possibility to migrate themselves; 2) the willingness to get more education in order to have a better chance of entering the labour market; and 3) to have their own marital home instead of sharing it with their family in law.

We do not have enough details about the two cases of migrant women to assess to what extent their experiences are seen as models by non migrant young women. In fact, among the women in our sample who clearly expressed their willingness to migrate, it is more through the influence of their male peers, sometimes their own husbands.

R : We (her and her husband) want to leave so much, even straight away...we could earn money

I: So if you stay here you can't earn money ?

R: Yes, you will earn money but you earn more abroad, in America.

I: For you that's the country where you can get rich ?

R: Yes, America and I want to go there.

I: What sort of work would you do there ?

R: Whatever work my religion allows, for example hairdressing. (aged 25, 2 children, illiterate, no links with migrant)

I : do you want to migrate?

R : Me, too much

I : Why ?

R: Because a migrant gets rich quickly (laughs) and me, I dream of having a house I've built myself.

(aged 23, unmarried, secondary schooling, migrant uncle)

These excerpts highlight the desire to get rich quickly and seem to be related to the woman's own projects. This is noteworthy in a context where women are not supposed to express too openly their aspirations (Ba, 2008, in her study on Senegalese migrant women in New York; Sakho and Dial, 2010, for illegal migrant women).

However, the two cases in our sample bring nuances to the idea that these responses express some kind of autonomy. One migrant woman is divorced and could migrate easily because she had a French passport whereas the other went to support her husband and experiences the same power relationships as if she hadn't migrated. These limitations to migrant women's personal fulfilment when they join their husbands have been highlighted in other studies (Ba et Bredeloup, 1997).

Such these cases in our sample of two migrant women seem to demonstrate how the differences between men and women regarding their aspirations and autonomy are maintained where neither had to go through the complex, stressful and costly processes of getting legal (or apparently legal) documents to go to Europe. Both of them could go to Europe because of their marital status which is totally different from migrant men's situations and thus questions their real autonomy and agency in their migration experience.

Regarding education, almost all women in our sample either express regrets for not having studied long enough, or formulate specific objectives to reach before getting married and the vast majority want all their children to get a minimum level of education.

I: Have you thought of getting married?

R: Hey. A husband.... No-one one comes near me because I am complicated. I calculate many things. I don't want there to be any obstacle to my studies. First I want to study and then if I get a husband he will know that I am independent and he can't spoil anything. I want to take my time. I said I will study first. It's for that reason that when I see someone who is studying and has a husband it makes me uneasy. I have a niece who got a husband last year. She's 19 and she has a husband...If you marry you should at least have the bac...If you are ambitious and you want to succeed it's better to wait a bit. You never know. You have to take care because you can have problems with your husband and your in laws. That's why it would be better to have a diploma and some work before you marry. (aged 23, single, university, migrant brothers)

Among those who prematurely interrupted their studies, some have nevertheless obtained some training (hairdresser, sewing). The link they establish between education and the access to the labour market is obvious for both young and older women, the latter being worried about their future of their children and not seeing marriage as the only goal and fulfilment in life for a woman anymore.

In most cases, women remain discreet regarding their economic activities; most spontaneously define themselves as housewife which is a woman's primary function in the Wolof society.

I : Have you already worked?

R : No, I don't work. I stay at home, look after the children and manage the house. My husband doesn't want me to work.

I : But would you have liked to work?

R : Yes because I love commerce right to my heart. (aged 44, 9 children, migrant sons and daughters)

However, as interviews progress, in most cases, women end up mentioning other activities they participating in, wish they could or did. Senegalese women's economic dynamism has already been documented, especially in the urban environment; in this small town context, between the rural and urban life styles, older women had to shift from agricultural to business activities. For those who hope to migrate, it is their experience in business that they want to develop.

Finally, the desire expressed by many women, migrant wives or not, to live in their own home rather than in their family in law's place, can be explained by two factors: the first one is general and for some exacerbated by their situation of migrant wives and is related to the endless conflicts that most newlywed women anticipate with fear. The second, directly related to the migration phenomenon in this community, is related to the luxurious villas built by migrants and thus the hope to have one for themselves and their children.

I prefer to live alone with my husband because living with your husband's family is difficult, with your mother and sisters in law it's difficult let alone the extended family. In large families there are slanders, hypocrisy, pettiness. People try to pit you against your husband (aged 25, married, 1 child, migrant cousins)

Conclusion

Whether migrant wives or not, women expect to be supported by their husband. However it is through their critical perspective that we can see signs of emancipation and personal aspirations in a context where, arranged marriages remain widespread and polygamy is frequent.

Although results seem to indicate that migration contributes to reinforce men's status by consolidating their role as family supporters, they also suggest that migration ends up modifying the social norms indirectly, where women position themselves *a contrario* by rejecting unequal situations that they are experiencing or which they are witnessing and which are exacerbated by migrants' behaviours. As Dial (2008) suggests, if repudiation is still practiced, it is likely that several divorced migrant wives, exasperated by their daily

life conditions, have pushed their husband to ask for the divorce in order to free themselves from this burdensome environment.

Husbands' long lasting absences, lead their wives who stay to deal with various people: their family in law, other women in the community who envy them and let them get by when they are in need of support, men and in particular their husbands who control them through their own family.

This study confirms the need to take into account the social and cultural context in which the migration process takes place. The difficulty of evaluation the role of migration in women's emancipation, whether migrant themselves or not, leads us to think more in depth of the methodologies to be developed in the future. Oso and Catarino (1996) highlight the pertinence of using longitudinal methods, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is also important to identify the relationships between the different members of the household, present or absent (Randall et al, in press). This would make it possible to identify and analyze the strategies and adjustments women operate across time and thus better capture migration's empowerment potential for Senegalese women.

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