

Chapter 10

The Changing Role of Women in Transnational Families Living in Senegal and Galicia

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Abstract In this chapter, I present a transnational and gender analysis of the dynamics and strategies of Senegalese families with members living in Galicia. I examine the specific features of many Senegalese families, such as their extended and patrilocal structure, and take a longitudinal approach, which considers what occurs both before and after the migration takes place and explores the important role of the migrant son or daughter and the relevance of other family roles, such as women who care for children and older members of the family, including their in-laws. Data were collected in the form of extended semi-structured interviews with 18 men and 12 women living in Senegal and Galicia, representing 14 transnational families, as well as 21 key informants working in political, social, or academic contexts. There are still relatively few studies analyzing these kinds of processes in the context of Senegalese migration, perhaps because of a tendency to privilege monetary exchange (earnings and remittances) over non-remunerated domestic duties, which is usually a feminine domain. The characteristics and practices of these families are far from atypical and may be productively compared with transnational families in similar migration contexts.

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of 14 transnational families living between Senegal and Galicia. The specific objective is to analyze the economic and care-taking reorganization of Senegalese families as they move between the country of origin and destination, with a particular emphasis on the transformation and

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adaptation of family and gender roles. Senegalese families tend to be patrilocal (married couples usually live with the man's family) and extended characteristics that render particularly interesting the analysis of their adaptation to the migratory process.

The concept of "transnational family" made a forceful entry onto the scene of migratory studies in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) define the term as a family whose members are divided among different states, but which maintains sufficient emotional, economic, and supportive unity to define itself as a family. In this sense, it is considered crucial to include in migration studies not only those who migrate, but those family members who remain in the country of origin (Baldassar et al. 2007, p. 14).

Despite the emergence of the transnational family as an important area of analysis, there are still very few studies of African transnational families from a perspective of gender, with a few interesting exceptions. Two pioneers in demonstrating specificities of African international migration are those of Findley (1999) and Adepoju and Mbugua (1999), both of which reveal the influence of the extended family on the migratory process. Findley (1999) argues that African migrations seem to prioritize alliance of the migrant with his or her own family lineage (mothers and brothers) over the marriage alliance. More recent publications have analyzed the dynamics of families from Senegal (Bledsoe and Sow 2013), Cabo Verde (Åkesson et al. 2012) and Ghana (Poeze and Mazzucato 2014). These studies demonstrate the need to take into account extended family structures and to reject reductionist analyses limited to immigrant parents and their children in countries of origin or destination, as these are not useful for understanding transnational West African family dynamics.

Research in other geographic contexts such as Mexican immigration to the USA (Pauli 2008; Oral 2006) has extended the analysis to relationships beyond the emigrant and spouse. This relationship is indeed central to the migratory process, but gender is a sociocultural construct involving ideals and practices that are negotiated in a context much broader than that of individual male–female relationships (Pauli 2008).

10.2 Migratory and Family Patterns in the New Senegalese Migration

Migration in Senegal, or rather the zone currently occupied by Senegal,¹ has involved four kinds of movements: internal (rural–urban), emigration to neighboring African countries, post-colonial movements to France, and the so-called new

¹Senegal achieved independence from France in 1960.

Senegalese migrations to the United State and various southern European countries (Portugal, Spain, and Italy). This most recent movement began at the end of the 1980s with the closing of the border with France and has involved mostly members of the Wolof ethnic group originating from the central-western region of the country and from major cities such as Dakar.

This is a male-dominated migration and does not tend to include processes of family reunification.² The MAFE (Migration between Africa and Europe) project provides data on Senegalese migrants in France, Italy, and Spain (n = 603) as well as non-immigrants and returnees residing in the Dakar region (n = 1,067). In their analysis of these data, González-Ferrer et al. (2012, p. 2) point out that approximately 16% of the sample of Senegalese children have a parent who emigrated to Europe for at least one year. These data indicate a high degree of separation between family members in Spain and Senegal.

There are two clearly distinguishable phases of Senegalese immigration to Spain: The first (1990) consisted of agricultural workers who migrated to the *Maresme* region of the Catalan Mediterranean coast, while the second (2000) expanded throughout the rest of the Iberian peninsula and has been associated mainly with street vending. In Galicia, as with the rest of Spain, the Senegalese migration remains a minority, although it constitutes the largest national group from sub-Saharan Africa. There are approximately 2,668 Senegalese immigrants in Galicia, representing 17.7% of the people originating from Africa (INE 2015). The Senegalese migrants living in Galicia tend to be male and quite young, with 32% ranging from 25 to 34 years of age, and only 14.3% are women (INE 2015).

10.3 Methodology

The study described here focused on 14 transnational families, with interviews of migrants residing in Galicia followed by interviews with their family members in Senegal, chiefly mothers, spouses, brothers, and, in some cases, aunts and cousins. The migrants themselves, by defining the family members most important to them, selected these relatives. In this way, I avoided preconceived, biological definitions of “family.”

In Galicia, I interviewed 30 immigrants (18 men and 12 women). Of these, I selected 14 whose sex, marital status, and migratory project represent the range of typologies characteristic of Senegalese migrants in Galicia. Since I set out to analyze the family transformations that resulted from the emigration, I was

²Camarero Rioja's (2010) analysis of National Immigrant Survey data shows the highest level of geographic separation with respect to spouses and children among sub-Saharan migrants (the majority of whom are Senegalese).

particularly interested in exploring results in terms of a migrant's marital status and migratory project, that is, whether the spouse, children, and or parents lived in the country of origin or destination. This would enable me to compare family changes for different kinds of transnational families.

Next I interviewed their family members in Senegal (a total of 19). Therefore, the data collection was divided into two phases: the first took place in Galicia (2008 and 2009) and the second consisted of two visits to Senegal (2009 and 2010) to conduct interviews in two urban areas (Dakar and Saint Louis) and one rural area in the country's interior (Louga). The 14 families included in the sample corresponded to a diverse family typology: married people with the entire family in Senegal (seven cases), married people who had engaged in some kind of family reunification (four cases), and single people (three cases).

In addition, in order to enrich the contextualization and analysis, I conducted several interviews with key informants in Galicia and in Senegal. These 21 individuals all shared a special relationship with Senegalese migration, representing a range of community, political, institutional, and academic agencies.

10.4 A Brief Characterization of Senegalese Families

Four elements summarize the characteristics of mainstream Senegalese/Wolof marriages and households. First, Senegalese (particularly women) marry early: The average marriage takes place shortly after the age of 22 for women, compared to 29 for men, with the age being significantly lower in rural areas, according to Senegal's National Agency for Statistics and Demographics (ANSD 2014). Second, these marriages are usually arranged within the extended family, usually between cousins (Dial 2008). The wife usually moves in with her husband's family following the wedding, making patrilocality the third characteristic of Senegalese families. Finally, about a quarter of the marriages in Senegal are polygamous (ANSD 2014).

The combination of early marriages, the coexistence of different generations under the same roof, and the extended practice of polygyny explain the large average size of eight members in the Senegalese household (ANSD 2014). Senegalese women have on average 5 children (World Bank n.d.). Consistent with the two core values of Wolof society (hierarchy and solidarity), households tend to be organized along age and gender lines. In Senegal, the head of the household is the older man; his mother, if present, also carries a great deal of authority, and the rest of the women in the household (wives, daughters, grandchildren, domestic workers) must show respect and care for her in every way possible (Potash 1993).

10.5 Family Roles in the Transnational Senegalese Migration in Galicia

A longitudinal perspective that took into consideration the family situation before and after the migratory process³ provided evidence that family roles were reinforced through emigration, in terms of remittances as well as caretaking relationships among family members.

10.5.1 *The Reinforcement of the Child's Role*

One of the primary conclusions of this study is that the role of the child in terms of economic contribution and caretaking responsibilities was clearly reinforced in the transnational behavior of these Senegalese families. As we already know, Senegalese homes include extended families: seven or eight people typically live in the family home, typically representing three generations. Given these circumstances, my results showed that men and women alike sent of remittances to their parents as the priority (particularly widowed mothers), their spouses and children (if there were any), and also brothers and sisters in many cases. These findings support the importance of the “intergenerational upward wealth flow” (Baykara-Krumme 2008, p. 287) in the economic behavior of Senegalese migrants. Furthermore, for the men, these contributions continued over time and were barely affected by processes such as family reunification involving the spouse or children. This result challenges the “remittance decay” hypothesis, or the idea that migrants reduce the money they send home once they initiate the process of nuclear family reunification (Stark 1978; Rinken 2006).

Nevertheless, my results call into question aspects of Findley’s (1999) research that emphasized the importance of the alliance with one’s own family lineage over the spousal alliance. My data suggest that while money sent home to the mother remains important, some male migrants are beginning to prioritize the spousal relationship once the marriage has achieved certain stability, especially in urban contexts. Even in these cases, migrants are careful to avoid a total economic rupture with their own families, especially with their mothers. The case of Abdou is illustrative of this tendency: He is building a house in Saint Louis (Senegal) where he will live with his wife and children when he returns, but he plans to rent one floor of the house in order to continue sending money to his mother (Fig. 10.1):

Since my father has this land, as my mother lives in my sisters’ flat, I have a license to build well, a good house, I have the possibility to make two floors, one to rent, for my family. Because I also have to send money for my family, for my mother! (E21: Abdou, 43 years old, married, from Saint Louis, residing in A Coruña since 2005)

³The interview rubric included retrospective questions concerning economic contribution and caretaking responsibilities before emigration.



Fig. 10.1 Mother who receives remittances from her two emigrant sons. Dakar, November 2010. Personal photo

The economic behavior of migrant women presents some special characteristics. Married women who are reunified with their spouses send a series of strategic contributions to their husband's family, primarily to their mother-in-law, a tendency not observed among married men. In the case of three women I interviewed, having lived with the mother-in-law prior to emigration seems to have a positive influence on these remittances. Evers (2010) has also identified this trend among Senegalese migrant women living in Tenerife (Spain). These remittances appear to constitute a compensation for having transgressed a gender norm: a transformation that must be managed with a great deal of care (Morokvasic 2007).

On the other hand, this behavior does not appear to apply to women who have emigrated independently, that is, those who have initiated their own migratory process. As single women migrants, they tend to come from very different households from those described above. While a nuclear family structure is relatively rare in Senegal, they are becoming more common in the capital city of Dakar. Even in these circumstances, the migratory process of these women involves the family, with the parents, particularly widowed mothers, playing a significant role in motivating the emigration. Aida's case exemplifies these characteristics. This 23-year-old woman immigrated to Galicia with a service industry contract

negotiated in the country of origin. Her family home is in Croisement Bethio, a working class neighborhood of Dakar, where she lived with her mother and older (25 years old) sister. Such a small family constitutes a significant departure from the extensive, patrilocal family structure described above. She explains that her migration was motivated in part by the opportunity to send money home to her mother and sister:

So I speak with my sister and my mother, live with me in Dakar, yes, my father died, and my mother has had all her life working for us, and I was an opportunity to go out a little and...I help her a little and mainly it was for that that I decided to come here, get work, and with the money that I make here I can help my family, because with 300 euros this will be enough to live a whole month...because they are two alone...so it was an opportunity, and so I said yes, I'm going! (E6: Aida, 23 years old, single, from Dakar, residing in Redondela and later in Vigo since 2008).

In sum, these data demonstrate the reinforcement of the family role of child, challenging the assumption expressed in some of the academic literature that sons remit with a view toward inheritance or investment, while it is the daughters who support parents with their remittances (Sanna and Massey 2005). My research suggests that sons, regardless of their marital status, also take on the role of supporters of their parents, particularly their mothers. However, there does seem to be a certain tension in some cases between the family and spouse alliance. This tension serves to demonstrate that family norms and values are not static, and this is indeed a topic of debate in modern Senegalese society. These situations also illustrate the sociocultural tensions within the society of the country of origin, where wives are gaining a certain degree of power in marital negotiations. During my data collection in Senegal, I observed a growing controversy, particularly among the younger generations and in urban areas, who question the more traditional family norms, including patrilocality and the excessive focus of economic resources on the mother-in-law. As early as 1993, Potash argued that the introduction of certain Western and Christian values was causing tensions in the African context with respect to the ideal of the devoted son who supports his mother. Such interpretations resonate with Mamadou's commentary on the social norm that wives should live with their husband's parents:

No woman wants to live with her mother-in-law, none. Before you couldn't say that, but they still didn't want to, but now they require...I tell you, the European freedom, the Western freedom that has come here, that came, that, they fought with that, I don't want, I don't want to live with your parents...I lost my parents very early, but I was lucky that way, to not have these kinds of problems living together. Now the girls, to get married to you, they ask you about your parents, they prefer not to live with your parents, they ask, they say, I live with my parents, my parents are very old - ah! This is a problem for the girl, because she is afraid. (E24: Mamadou, 45 years old, married, from Dakar, residing in Vigo since 2005).

10.5.2 The Circulation of Care in These Transnational Families

Aside from the economic, another aspect of these transnational families that is particularly interesting from a gender perspective is the way in which caretaking responsibilities are organized and distributed. This study adopts Baldassar and Merla's (2014) theoretical perspective of the circulation of care, in which care is understood as multidirectional: between migrants and non-migrants and between the country of origin and destination. In this sense, care flows from origin to destination and back to origin, although this multidirectionality is not exempt from asymmetrical power relations, as we will see in this section.

First I will examine how caretaking responsibility is managed when married men emigrate. As a general rule, once Senegalese women are married, they take on domestic and care-related tasks in their new patrilocal household. When the husband emigrates, the role of his wife (or wives) in caring for both the young and the elderly and maintaining family ties with the migrant becomes particularly crucial, especially if they live under the same roof, as is usually the case.

In this sense, once the husband has emigrated, the wife's role as caretaker of her in-laws, particularly the mother-in-law, becomes essential. She is the one who cares for and satisfies the needs of the migrant's parents, thus maintaining in good status the relationships that are important for the absent migrant. This work is consistent with what Micaela di Leonardo (1987) calls "kin work"—those actions that foster and maintain social relations with biological relatives and in-laws. The variety of caring tasks that emigrants' wives carry out with respect to their husbands' families include cleaning their rooms, preparing meals, administering medication, bathing, taking them to the doctor, keeping them company at home, talking with them, etc. As Binette summarizes:

"I did everything - to cure, pills, baths, doctors..." (Binette, 37 years old, married, from Dakar, residing in Vigo since 1994).

My data reveal that the situation of these wives in their Senegalese households can be quite complicated. The daughter-in-law's work in the husband's family's household is subject to intense scrutiny, especially during the early years of marriage when the new bride has to confront the absence of her spouse as well as her in-laws' suspicions concerning her motivations for marrying the "successful migrant." The wife's comings and goings are typically monitored by her husband's parents and by his brothers and sisters. The Senegalese social imaginary surrounding international migration tends to stigmatize the migrant's wife. The family's control is heightened by the myth of the young wife who seeks out a migrant husband in order to take financial advantage of him, so she is obligated to demonstrate to his family that she has not married out of purely economic interest.

Similar interpretations have been found in other masculinized migratory contexts. Oral (2006), for example, applies the same analytical framework to women's household work with their migrant husband's mother and sisters in Mexico:

The women invest their time, energy, and emotions in negotiating relations within the family networks of patrilocal communities: pleasing their mothers-in-law and their sisters-in-law, trying to be “a good wife” and to avoid a “bad report” - central aspects of their everyday lives as emigrants’ wives (Oral 2006, p. 420).

It’s important to keep in mind that, through his wife’s household care work, the family considers the emigrant to be fulfilling the role of “good son.” This does not, however, release him from his responsibility to return home every year or two to visit his parents, wife, and children. Nevertheless, the caring work of these migrant males during their home visits is reduced to “caring about,” which is limited to concern and spending time with them and does not include tasks such as cooking and bathing, which are better described as “caring for.”

What happens when these wives are reunified with their husbands in the destination country? In this case, we see the emergence of the figure of the “transnational daughter-in-law” (Vázquez Silva 2010), who must maintain relations with her in-laws in the country of origin by calling them and sending money or gifts to compensate for her absence. Two of my research participants also reported pressure from their in-laws to remain at home rather than emigrate. However, the extensive nature of these families means that there are other women living in the home who can mitigate the intensity of the transnational care expected of women emigrants.

On the other hand, the situation of single and married women emigrants differs substantially from that described by women who join their husbands in the destination country through family reunification. The fact that independent female immigrants come from atypical nuclear families rather than the traditional patrilocal norm creates a crucial distinction. In these cases, concern and caring for their own parents and siblings is the priority, relegating the in-laws to a secondary position. Aminata’s case is illustrative: a married woman who emigrated to Vigo (Galicia) while her husband stayed behind, she had never lived with her husband’s family in Dakar, but lived alone with her husband in Dakar before emigrating. Since her arrival, she has been sending remittances to her mother and brothers. After living for several years in Galicia, she temporarily took in her mother, so that she could receive medical treatment. Aminata’s case contrasts with other studies involving grandmothers emigrating to the destination country to care for grandchildren rather than to receive care from their own daughters (see, for example, Escrivá and Skinner’s 2008 study of Peruvian immigrants in Spain).

10.6 Conclusions

This study of transnational Senegalese families in Galicia presents two main conclusions. First, the analysis of family dynamics points to a strengthening of the children’s economic role and the particular importance of the mother–child dyad. Senegalese male migration does not seem to constitute a continuation of the male absentee role in the household, as other studies have indicated. In other words, the

Senegalese man, whether married or single, does not share the capacity of other male migrants to keep money for his own expenses, as Tacoli (1999) has found to be the case among Filipino men who emigrate to Italy. However, there does appear to be some tension for the Senegalese migrant, particularly for those of urban origins, between family and spousal alliances.

A range of interrelated social processes account for the reaffirmation of certain family positions among Senegalese men and women who emigrate, including social norms associated with family roles. For men and women alike, it is a matter of pride to be able to support their parents and siblings. For men, it is also an obligation to maintain their wives and children. As demonstrated in previous research (Tacoli 1999), knowledge of the obligations and norms associated with each family figure is crucial for understanding why migrants send money to certain family members and not to others.

Second, this study confirms that the nuclear family is an insufficient framework for understanding Senegalese transnational family dynamics. In fact, certain in-law relationships have proven fundamental to understanding how Senegalese men and women manage their transnational lives.

My reflection on the economic and caring triangle created by a male migrant, his wife in Senegal, and his mother reveals the limitations of a cooperative household model, or one that assumes that family members share a common goal (Vázquez Silva and Wolf 1990). My analysis of this triangle reveals the influence of the family structure and relationships in the circulation of care across national borders, with the emergence of the transnational daughter-in-law. The fact that she lives under the same roof with her mother-in-law may, in some cases, discourage the woman from emigrating. In this sense, we can see how family ideologies and normative gender roles relating to the care of the migrant male's mother affect migration selection, in terms of who stays at home.

On the other hand, there has been very little research analyzing the impact of post-marital residence (extensive or nuclear, patrilocal or no) on encouraging or discouraging the migration of both women and men (Mahler and Pessar 2006, p. 35). I have found no studies that specifically examine these kinds of relations in Senegalese migration. This would be an interesting line of research to develop, perhaps with a comparative analysis of ways in which post-marital residence patterns and the web of gender relations within them influence how transnational families operate.

To summarize, the perspective of home and family in the context of African migrations remains in the initial phases of development. It is urgent that we open up debate around the role that different family structures can play in the understanding of migratory processes.

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