

# Chapter 15

## Senegalese Families Between Here and There



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### 15.1 Introduction

Family reunification has become the main legal means for migrants to enter Europe. Both at the European and national levels, family reunification has become a major concern for policy makers who design increasingly constraining policies in this domain. The belief that African immigrants, among others, overuse their right to family reunification is widespread in Europe (European Migration Network 2012). In France in particular, sub-Saharan migrants and their families – among whom Senegalese migrants form one of the largest groups – have been particularly stigmatized in the 2000s. They are often presented as poorly integrated and were publicly blamed for the 2005 riots. In the following years, family reunification was labeled as *migration subie* (i.e. unwanted, although legal, migration), as opposed to *migration choisie* (i.e., chosen migration, thanks to the selection of working adults).

These views conflict with the findings of recent socio-anthropological studies on West African migrants, especially Senegalese migrants, which show that they are reluctant to reunify in France, Spain or Italy and that they often maintain transnational lives, involving comings and goings and based on a multi-sited distribution of

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family members (Barou 2001; Riccio 2006). Conventional data are not suited to measuring these kinds of family arrangements. Most of the figures available on family migration are administrative data on family reunification. They count the close relatives – spouses and children – who enter European countries to join a prior migrant, but give no account of relatives who stay in their origin country. As a result these data say nothing about transnational families, i.e. those families whose members live in different countries. In addition, since data on out-migration from European countries are quite rare, there is also no information on family reunification in the origin countries, i.e. reunification resulting from the return of a migrant to their home country, where they meet up again with their family.

The data of the MAFE project make it possible to give a more complete picture of the various family arrangements among African migrants. The aim of this paper is to assess the extent of transnational vs. reunified families among Senegalese migrants, adopting a dual viewpoint based on the use of data collected both in Europe (France, Italy and Spain) and in Africa (Senegal). The second section will provide an overview of the existing literature on Senegalese families and will show that living apart is quite a common arrangement in the Senegalese context. This leads to the hypothesis that transnational families are, to a large extent, an extension of this way of life, although they may also result from policy restrictions aimed at curbing family reunification. The third section uses the MAFE data to look at the extent to which households in the Dakar region are indeed involved in transnational families. The next section turns to a European view of transnational families (their numbers and socio-economic characteristics), using individual and biographical data collected among migrants in Europe. And, finally, the last section – before the conclusion – examines how transnational families are formed and how they evolve (or not) into reunified families.

## 15.2 Migration and Family in Senegal: A Literature Review

### 15.2.1 *Multi-residence as a Common Family Arrangement in Senegal*

Senegalese families are very different from the nuclear family model with mother, father and minor children living together in a household of limited size. Senegalese households are among the largest in West Africa, with an average number of 9.5 people in rural areas in 1997 and 8.2 in urban areas, where 44% of all households consist of nine individuals or more (Locoh and Mouvagha-Sow 2005).<sup>1</sup> Household composition is particularly complex, both because polygamy is common and because families quite often function under a multi-residential system in which fathers, mothers and children live in separate places. In this section, we briefly and roughly describe family arrangements in Senegal, with a special focus on the location of family members.

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<sup>1</sup>After Senegal, the highest proportion of extended households in the region is 24%, in Guinea. This wide gap between the two countries with the highest proportions clearly illustrates the prevalence of large extended families among Senegalese family structures.

This very general description of Senegalese family functioning does not do justice to the diversity of family arrangements in Senegal, which vary from one region to another and evolve over time, especially in a context of growing urbanisation and increasing availability of formal education. However, it does provide some clues for understanding how some Senegalese families become transnational families.

**“Living Apart Together” Partners** For various reasons and as in many other sub-Saharan countries, it is quite common in Senegal for spouses to “have marriages where the level of conjugal interaction is quite low” (Findley 1997). In daily life, husbands and wives take their meals separately, rarely socialize together and have separate rooms, if not separate houses, as it is often the case in Dakar among polygamous families (Marie 1997). This can be explained by the fact that choosing a partner is not a personal matter: matrimonial unions are more often alliances between families than individual companionships, and decisions are often highly influenced (if not actually decided) by the elders. Family-arranged marriages remain a social norm, even among families with migrants in Europe (Mondain 2009a, b). Polygamy and age differences – 10 to 15 years in Dakar in 2001, depending on generation (Dial 2008) – tend also to impose a certain distance between spouses. This “weakness of the conjugal bond” (Findley 1997) is a way to reproduce the lineage-based organisation of society: too much intimacy between spouses could lead the couple to want more independence and could weaken the extended family (Poiret 1996). In short, couples have to “lack consistency” in order to respect and reproduce the social order (Barou 2002). This social distance between Senegalese spouses tends to make spatial separation easier. In Senegal even more than in other African countries, there quite a high proportion of spouses live in separate places: “in areas [of sub-Saharan Africa] where this pattern is found, around one-third of wives stay behind while their husbands go to cities or other rural areas to work”, with the highest rates (43 to 68%) being registered in Senegal (Findley 1997).

**Fostered Children** Living apart is not only frequent within couples. Children also quite frequently live away from their parents. Senegal is the country with the highest proportion of fostered children aged under 15 in West Africa, with 28% in rural areas and 35% in urban areas (Locoh and Mouvagha-Sow 2005). In Senegal, as in other West African countries, no stigma is attached to fosterage; it is a widely accepted practice. Again, this can be explained by the role of the extended family; the children “belong” more to their lineage than to their biological parents. Moving children between households is part of the social system in a culture where direct biological links are not considered the most important. In matrilineal ethnic groups, a child’s links with their father are weaker in matters of authority and inheritance than their links with their maternal uncle (mother’s brother). Thus, the well-being of the child does not depend necessarily on proximity with their biological parents (Bledsoe 2008). Fosterage is organized not only in cases of decease or when the parents are overloaded. Living in a different household is part of a child’s education. It is considered by all to be a form of training for social life in a large group. For some, fosterage is synonymous with early work apprenticeship. For others, especially children born in rural areas and sent to town, being fostered provides a chance to go to a (better) school (Locoh and Mouvagha-Sow 2005).

**Ubiquitous Families** With couples whose level of interaction is low and children whose education can be entrusted to relatives other than the parents, members of the same nuclear family can be scattered around several places. More often than not, such residential patterns reflect economic strategies defined within the extended family, usually by the elders. Scattering individuals around different places to share resources and risks is a form of organisation that fits the family model of NELM theories quite well (Stark 1991). The extended family continues to function as a social and economic unit across geographical distance. Thus the Senegalese family functions as a “ubiquitous” organization, as it has been called in other sub-Saharan countries (Dupont and Dureau 1986; Lututala 1989). Since the 1990s, this kind of multi-residential system has received a boost from the economic crisis: families increasingly try to simultaneously take advantage of the opportunities offered by different places in order to overcome their financial difficulties (Chaléard and Dubresson 1989; Findley 1997; Potts 1997). These family arrangements are not limited by state borders: families also take advantage of opportunities offered in foreign countries. Members of the same family may be spread across several countries and thus form what can be called a “transnational family”.

### *15.2.2 Family and International Migration: A Short History*

Although migration to Europe, and especially France, started in the early twentieth century in Senegal, it became a significant movement only in the early 1960s. Since then, though migration has always been a family matter, the roles of the various family members has evolved over time. This section summarizes that evolution.

**Young Male Migrants Under Control** The first significant wave of out-migration from Senegal started in the early 1960s in the Northern part of the country, among Soninke and Toucouleurs of the Senegal River Valley. At first, international and domestic migration were clearly a community matter and were organised as a collective system dominated by the elders (Quiminal 1991; Timera 1996; Guilmoto 1998). Young single men were sent to France on a temporary basis. They were expected to come back a first time after about 10 years to marry a young woman chosen by the elders. Then they left again for a two or three year period, with visits to the home village in between that allowed them to take a new spouse (or several) and insure the reproduction of the family. When they finally returned for good, they were well-to-do polygamous men and new migrants were sent to France in their place. During husbands’ absences, wives and children were left behind with the migrants’ families, which offered several advantages to the elders: it ensured that migrants would send remittances (especially as most migrants had no family burden at destination); it offered a workforce to the extended family (all the more necessary since young men were absent), and it ensured that migrants would come back to the home village in the end. For all these reasons, the elders were opposed to any form of “family reunification” as conceived in Europe, i.e. implying the out-migration of

wives and children. In destination regions, hometown associations helped to maintain this social order.

**The Gradual Onset of Family Reunification in France** In the mid 1970s, the economic crisis made a breach in this well-oiled system (Barou 2001). Circulating between Europe and Africa became much more complicated, both because of government regulations (French borders were closed to new international labour migrants in 1974) and for economic reasons (it was becoming much harder to quit a job in France for a sojourn in Senegal and find a new job on coming back). Basically, migrants had to stay long-term in France or go back for good. In 1976, new legal measures clarified the possibilities for family reunification in France. Despite opposition from the elders, some migrants took this opportunity to bring their spouse(s) to France, and also – sometimes – their children. Thus Senegalese female immigration started in the late 1970s, quite late compared to other groups (Timera 1996; Barou 2002). Senegalese reunified families soon came up against various difficulties. The polygamous ones particularly encountered integration problems and serious housing difficulties. At the same time, new relationship problems arose within the reunified families. Their isolation from the extended families strongly disrupted the usual forms of social organisation and control: the dominant role of the father and husband started to be contested and divorces multiplied (Barou 2002). The idea that French law was too favourable to women spread among the Senegalese community, so that males started to fear family reunification, a feeling fuelled by the elders in the home villages (Azoulay and Quiminal 2002). Finally, a new legal obstacle appeared: in 1993, a law forbade reunification of polygamous families. For all these reasons, family reunification at destination never became a universal goal for Senegalese migrants. It even happens that wives and children are sent back to the home country.

**New Migrants in Spain and Italy** Spain and Italy became new destinations for Senegalese migrants from the 1980s onwards. For various reasons, the migrants who head towards these countries are not entirely similar to those who left for France. Although they are enmeshed in the same kind of social constraints, especially regarding generational and gender relationships, most of them being of Wolof origin, a patrilineal group like the Soninke and Toucouleur of the Senegal River Valley, they differ in several respects. Firstly, they left more recently, at a time when the elders' control had weakened. Although their departure could generally not be decided without their parents' consent, this new generation of migrants tends more often to move without parental permission (Lalou and Ndione 2005; Riccio 2008). Secondly, a significant number of them originate from urban areas (including Dakar), while the bulk of the Senegal River Valley migrants were of rural origin. Third, migrants in Italy and Spain are more often than in France involved in the Murid brotherhood, a very structured religious group that strongly encourages international migrants to keep a strong attachment to Senegal (Riccio 2006).

Senegalese migrants in Italy are labelled “transmigrants” in recent socio-anthropological studies (Riccio 2006; Sinatti 2011) that emphasize their attachment to their home country and describe how they organise their working life so that they

can come and go between Europe and Senegal. In a context where family reunion is legally possible,<sup>2</sup> Riccio refers to their “resistance to family reunification” and interprets it as both an economic choice (relatives are more expensive to maintain in Europe) and a social option. “For Senegalese, [family reunion] can become a source of stigmatisation expressed through the fear that children may lose their cultural and religious bearings by living abroad” (Riccio 2008). The matrimonial pattern of these new migrants is very similar to the model described above: marriages are arranged by the elders, spouses have usually no interactions before they wed, unions are sealed quickly during migrants’ visits, and the wives are then left to their in-laws (Mondain 2009a, b).

### ***15.2.3 Transnational vs. Reunified Families: Previous Statistical Evidence***

All in all, the socio-anthropological literature on Senegalese migrants in Europe suggests quite clearly that they are not very prone to family reunification, whatever country they are living in. However, this literature is mainly based on case studies and does not provide any measure of the numbers of transnational families, i.e. families whose members (spouses and children) live across borders, one member being in Europe. Although, in general, few quantitative data are available on transnational families (Mazzucato and Schans 2011), two nationally representative surveys in France and Spain provide some evidence in the matter (no equivalent survey is available for Italy). In France and Spain, sub-Saharan migrants – and especially those from Senegal – appear to have a stronger tendency than migrants of other groups to maintain a dispersed type of family. This appears to be especially true of the parent-child relationship (Eremenko and Gonzalez-Ferrer 2012). In France, according to the TeO Survey (2008-2009), only 25% of the children left behind by at least one of their parent(s) had joined them 5 years after separation. In Spain, according to ENI, after a similar separation, the proportion was even lower, with only 10% of reunified children among Senegalese, while the proportion was almost 50% among Eastern Europeans and South Americans and 40% among migrants from North Africa. As regards couples, so far results are only available in Spain, for sub-Saharan migrants as a whole, who also emerge as a particular population: 19% of all African men (excluding Morocco and South Africa) in Spain are engaged in transnational unions (i.e. they were in a union before entering Spain and their partner was still outside Spain at the time of the survey). This compares with only 8% on average for all immigrants (Esteve and Cortina 2009). And this special feature remains when controlling for education, period of entry and age at the time of

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<sup>2</sup>Family reunification is governed by a law passed in 1998 in Italy and a royal decree of 1996 in Spain. Even though reunification rules were defined later in these two new countries of immigration than in France, the criteria used to grant the right of reunification are very similar in France, Italy and Spain, the three European countries in our study.

immigration. How is this particularity – this way of living as a dispersed family – to be interpreted?

It is probably not the result of selection by governments. Although Spain and France have indeed introduced increasingly stringent reunification policies, in principle, no government selects candidates for reunification according to their origin. A more credible explanation is to do with migration history: sub-Saharan people in both countries arrived quite recently compared to other groups and it may be that reunification happens more quickly when a group is more settled and the opportunities for integration more diverse. This would, for example, explain why reunification of Senegalese children is less common in Spain than in France, where Senegalese immigration is older. Another explanation is socio-cultural and is related to the differences in migrants' tendency to reunify with their family according to origin. The way family life is organized in Senegal, on an extended mode, with spouses and children commonly living apart, helps to explain why Senegalese migrants would tend to postpone, or even avoid, family reunification in Europe. Some of them may even prefer to reunify in Senegal, after a temporary stay abroad. This option is consistent with the indications of a substantial tendency to return. Ten years after their departure, about 25% of migrants who had left to go to a Western country (mainly Europe) were back in their home country (Flahaux et al. 2013) (on return migration, see also [Chaps. 3 and 13](#) in this book). Nonetheless, some Senegalese migrants decide to reunify at destination in Europe while others do not. Why is that? Two studies using the MAFE data to focus on the factors for reunification with spouses and children among Senegalese migrants have shown that they are less likely to reunify in Europe (a) when their family model departs from the Western nuclear model (when they are polygamous, with larger numbers of children, a stronger dependency to the elders, etc.) and (b) when their socio-economic integration at destination is weak (González-Ferrer et al. 2012; Baizán et al. 2014).

### 15.3 Migrant Families: A View from Senegal

The purpose of this section is to assess the extent to which households in the Dakar region are involved in transnational families (see definitions in [Chap. 6, Box 6.1](#)). This means finding out firstly whether and to what extent household heads have relations living abroad as migrants, and secondly to what extent households have links with international migrants through social and economic remittances.<sup>3</sup> This question is important from a policy standpoint, for at least two reasons. Firstly, it is related to migration management issues since migrants' spouses and children under 18 have the potential to move to Europe through reunification procedures, although not all of them will do so, as is shown in a following section. Secondly, it connects with the issue of what contribution international migration makes to poverty

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<sup>3</sup>Social remittances are the non-material contacts through which migrants and their households at origin can influence each other, for instance in terms of ideas, norms and ways of doing things.

alleviation and to social and economic development, a question of major interest for most governmental and non-governmental bodies involved in international migration. Basically, our analysis will provide a measure of the proportion of households that receive a material benefit from international migration. More generally, we will study the various kinds of relationships that migrants have with households left behind and which make it possible for families to live apart across borders.

### 15.3.1 *An Account of Those Left Behind in Dakar*

A first important result of the MAFE survey is that many households living in Dakar are involved in transnational families: almost half of them (47%, Table 15.1) declared at least one relative living abroad. To some extent, this high percentage is due to the fact that all kinds of family relationships are taken into account in the figure. However, only migrants who had regular contacts with the surveyed households over the previous 12 months were registered, and a majority of these used to live within the household. 47% is thus a correct, albeit high estimation of the proportion of transnational families in the Dakar region. In more detail, it emerges that 6% of the married household heads ( $N = 848$ ) are involved in a transnational couple since they have a spouse abroad. More commonly, among household heads who have children ( $N = 1032$ ), one in five declared at least one child living abroad, most of these being adult children. And of all household heads ( $N = 1141$ ), almost a third

**Table 15.1** Households with migrants abroad

	%	N <sup>a</sup>
Married heads with spouse(s) abroad <sup>b</sup>	6%	848
Heads with child(ren) abroad, including ...	21%	1032
... heads with at least one child <18 living abroad	2%	
Heads who have other relatives (neither spouse nor child) abroad, including <sup>c</sup> ...	30%	1141
... heads with at least one contact abroad who lived within the household (at least 6 months)	22%	
... heads with contacts abroad who never lived in the household	9%	
Heads who declared at least one contact abroad (whatever the relationship)	47%	1141

Interpretation: There are 848 married heads in our sample, of whom 6.0% have at least a spouse abroad (weighted percentage)

Source: MAFE Senegal, household survey

Notes:

<sup>a</sup>N corresponds to the total unweighted number of individuals from which the percentages are computed. Percentages are weighted

<sup>b</sup>In the case of polygamous marriages, we look at those household heads with at least one spouse abroad

<sup>c</sup>This category includes all relatives of the head or of his/her partner (other than children) who are living abroad and who have been in regular contact with the household over the past 12 months. This category includes heads who have child(ren) and/or spouse(s) abroad as well as other relatives



(30%) declared other relatives abroad (possibly in addition to spouses and/or children), this proportion being reduced to 22% if only those who used to live in the household are taken into account.

Bearing in mind that Senegalese international migration is predominantly male (see Chap. 13), it is not surprising to find that left-behind spouses are mostly women. While only 2% of the male married heads interviewed in Dakar have their spouse abroad, this is the case for 23% of the female heads living in Dakar (Table 15.2). In other words, almost a quarter of married female heads living in Dakar have their spouse abroad. In addition, 44% of them declared that their husband was living in another household in Senegal (possibly in Dakar), which matches what was found in the literature review: it is common in Senegal for couples to live apart (i.e. in separate households). Again, many more female heads than male declare that they do not live with their spouse (spouse living in Senegal) (9% against 44%). This gender difference can be explained by polygamous arrangements in which each wife has her own dwelling while the husband rotates from one wife/dwelling to another. In any case, this result reminds us that transnational couples are just one form of living-apart couples in a context where the spatial proximity of the spouses is not a prerequisite for family life.

### 15.3.2 Families Functioning Across Borders

Quantitative data are not the best suited to showing the complexity of the relationships between family members who live at a far distance. They can however give some insights into the variety of the contacts between migrants and their origin households. They show, for instance, that the functioning of families spread across

**Table 15.2** Spousal living arrangements of household heads, by sex

	Total		Sex of the head			
	<i>f</i>	%	Male		Female	
			<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Household heads live ...						
With their spouse	633	78	580	89	53	33
Apart, with spouse abroad	74	6	16	2	58	23
Apart, with spouse in Senegal <sup>a</sup>	141	16	60	9	81	44
Total	848	100	656	100	192	100

Note: unweighted numbers & weighted percentages; Time of Survey: 2008

Population: Senegalese married household heads (n = 848)

Interpretation: 78% of married household heads live together with their spouse

Statistical significance: The difference between male and female household heads is significant (p = 0.000, Design-based F-test)

<sup>a</sup>The category “living apart, with spouse in Senegal” consist of: (1) heads who listed their spouse(s) and indicated they were living outside the household, and (2) heads who did not list a spouse, but indicated being married and having a spouse, and that this spouse was not abroad

borders rests on various sorts of relationships: migrants combine several types of contacts with their origin household, the variety of these contacts being greater for those who are closer to the head, especially spouses (Table 15.3). Distance communication (by telephone, mail, email etc.) is by far the most common type of relationship (declared by 94% of all households with migrants, Table 15.4), followed by monetary transfers (60%), visits (51%) and in-kind remittances (33%).

Interestingly, *not all households who declare migrants abroad receive a direct economic benefit from migration*. Among the households who declared at least one migrant abroad, only 60% had received money in the previous 12 months and only 33% had received goods (Table 15.4). Another interesting result is that *those migrants who contribute to the domestic economy of the Dakarian households are not only those most closely related to the heads*. Only 7% of those who sent monetary remittances and 9% of those who send goods are spouses (Table 15.4). And their contribution to the households' economy is quite moderate: 29% (Fig. 15.1) of the spouses living abroad provide a "very large" or "large" share of all the household's expenditures, a proportion which is below the average for all migrants regardless of relationship to the head (31%, Fig. 15.1). It remains that spouses are more

**Table 15.3** Composition of the migrant population by type of contact (over the previous 12 months) and type of family relationship

Relationship to head	Type of contact					Average number of contacts <sup>a</sup>	Composition of the migrant population
	Monetary remittances	In-kind remittances	Visits	Distance communication			
				Once a week	Less than once a month		
Spouses	7%	9%	7%	9%	3%	2.6	5%
Children 0-18	1%	1%	0%	1%	4%	1.0	3%
Children >18	37%	36%	27%	38%	17%	1.8	30%
Siblings	23%	27%	24%	23%	30%	1.8	24%
Other	31%	28%	40%	28%	47%	1.6	38%
Missing	1%	1%	1%	1%	0.0%	–	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	1.8	100%
N	648	336	471	507	228	1227	1227

Note: unweighted numbers & weighted percentages; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese households' migratory contacts who sent monetary remittances (N = 648), or in-kind remittances (N = 336), or who visited their origin household (N = 471), etc

Interpretation: 7% of the migrants who sent money are spouses of a household head

Statistical significance (F-test, one-way anova): The differences in percentages by type of relationship is significant for each type of contact (in all cases,  $p = 0.000$ )

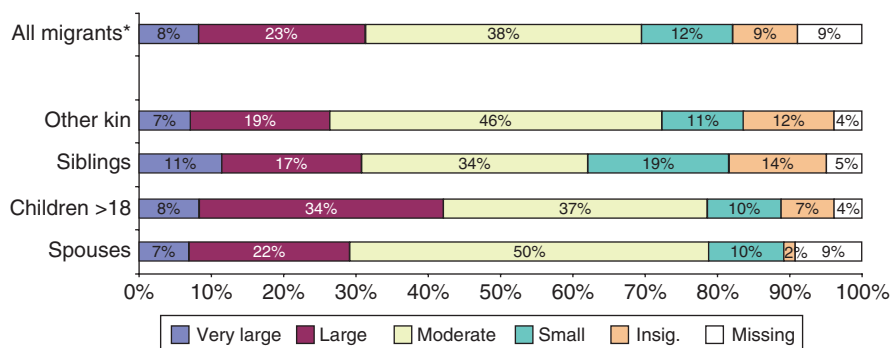
<sup>a</sup>This number is computed as a score adding 1 point for each of the following contacts: visit, in-kind remittance, monetary remittance, at least an annual distance communication. A score of 0 means that the migrant had no contact at all with the household. A score of 4 means that the migrants combined all kinds of contacts

**Table 15.4** Contacts over the 12 months between the households (with migrants) and their migrants

	% of households with migrants who ...	Average number of migrants with contacts per household
... received monetary remittances	60%	1.6
... received in-kind remittances	33%	1.4
... received at least one visit by a migrant	51%	1.4
... communicated with at least one migrant	94%	1.9

Note: weighted percentages; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese households with migratory contacts (N = 617)

Interpretation: 60% of households with migrants received monetary remittances

**Fig. 15.1** Share of household expenditure, by type of relationship with household migrants: relative importance of contributions

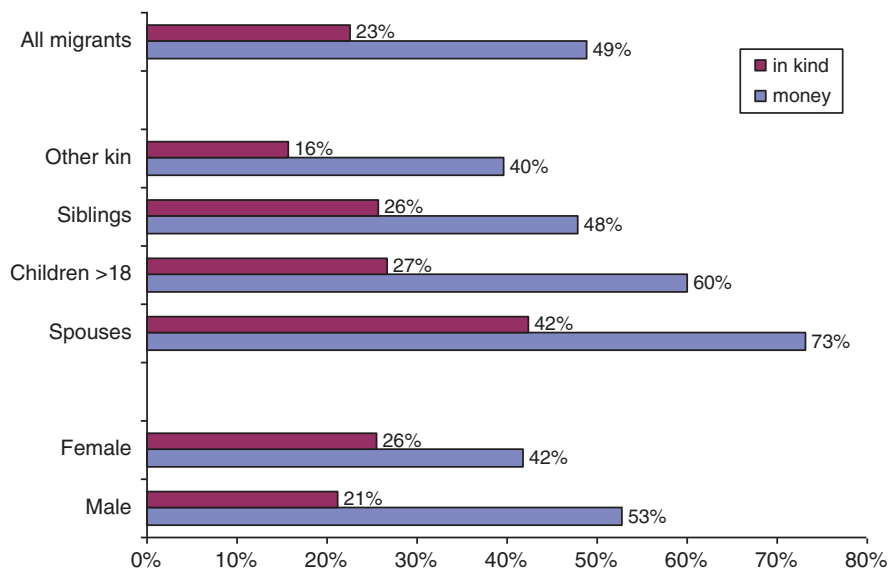
Note: unweighted numbers & weighted percentages; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese households' migratory contacts who contribute (n = 773)

\* The "All migrants" category includes spouses, children over 18, siblings and other kin, and also children under 18 and migrants whose relationship with the head is unknown

Interpretation: Among the migrants who are heads' spouses, 7% contributed a very large share, 22% a large share, 50% a moderate share, etc. of household expenditure over the last 12 months. Answers to the question "What share of the household's expenditures on food, medicine, housing, transport, etc. have been covered by the money and in-kind transfers you have received from "Name" over the last 12 months?"

Statistical significance: The difference by type of relationship is significant ( $p = 0.040$ , Design-based F-test)

likely than others to remit: 73% of them had sent money over the previous 12 months, against 49% on average for all migrants (Fig. 15.2). Children, once they are adult, have a lesser propensity to remit (Fig. 15.2), but they make a bigger economic contribution than the spouses: they are the most numerous remitters (37%, Table 15.3) and it is they who contribute in the largest share to the expenditures of their origin household (Fig. 15.1). Beyond spouses and children, other relatives also play an important role in the economic life of the households in Dakar. Although their rate of remittance is lower than those of spouses and children (Fig. 15.2), they represent



**Fig. 15.2** Remittance rates by sex and relationship to the head, according to type of remittance

Note: Weighted percentages; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese households' migratory contacts (n = 1227). Children <18 and migrants whose relationship with the head is unknown are not represented

Interpretation: Of migrant spouses, 73% remit money and 42% send goods (in-kind remittances)  
 Statistical significance: In-kind remittances: the difference by type of relationship is significant ( $p = 0.000$ , Design-based F-test); the difference by sex is not significant ( $p = 0.358$ , Design-based F-test) – Monetary remittances: the difference by type of relationship is significant ( $p = 0.000$ , Design-based F-test); the difference by sex is significant ( $p = 0.079$ , Design-based F-test)

more than half of all contributors, in terms of both money and goods (Table 15.3), and the amount of their contribution is quite significant. 28% of the siblings and 26% of other migrants contribute a “large” or “very large” share to the household's expenditures, which is hardly less than the spouses' share (Fig. 15.1).

These results show quite well that Senegalese families function on an extended basis and that a Westernized view of the family, restricted to its nucleus, is not appropriate for measuring the prevalence of transnational families or for understanding the social and economic effects of migration. Interestingly, our results also show that *remitting is not only determined by a preliminary contract between the migrant and his/her household of origin*. Indeed, it appears that 27% of all migrants had received some kind of support for organizing their migration from the household that declared them. Of these, only 50% had remitted money in the previous 12 months. The proportion is similar (53%) among those who had not received any support (unshown results). This suggests that supporting a migrant with his/her migration trip does not increase the chance of receiving remittances. In the end, it appears that some migrants, some closely related to the head of their origin house-

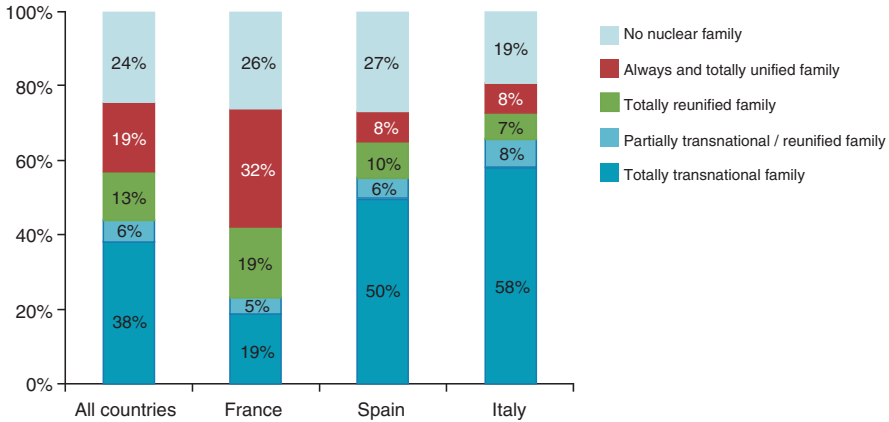
hold and even some who have received help for organizing their departure, do not remit. Is this because they cannot or because they are engaged in an individual migratory project? More analysis is needed to answer this question and to further explore and disentangle the role of family in migration rationales.

## 15.4 Migrant Families from the European Viewpoint

Transnational families consist, by definition, of people living in different countries. It is thus theoretically possible to adopt more than one perspective to study them, i.e. the viewpoint of the origin country and the viewpoints of the destination countries. In the previous section, Senegalese families were studied with the perspective of the sending country, using data collected from households at origin. In this section, we adopt the reverse viewpoint, using data collected among migrants in Europe, specifically France, Italy and Spain. Since family reunification with spouses and children is a concern for European governments (very few of which give the possibility of reunification to other relatives), in this section we adopt a nuclear approach to family. Using a typology fully explained in [Chap. 6](#) ([Table 6.19](#) and [Box 6.1](#)), we distinguish migrants in Europe according to the location of their spouse(s) and children under 18 (apart from migrants who have no nuclear family). This typology forms a gradient from “totally unified families” to “totally transnational families”, with possible intermediary situations (“totally reunified families” and “partially reunified families”). We first assess the amount of transnational vs. other types of families, and then study to what extent these families differ from one another in terms of their socio-economic characteristics.

### 15.4.1 Prevalence of Transnational vs. (re)Unified Families

**Transnational Life: The Most Frequent Family Arrangement** The most striking result when looking at the family arrangements of Senegalese migrants in Europe is the high proportion of transnational families. *Almost half of all Senegalese immigrants in France, Italy or Spain (44%, Fig. 15.3) live in a different country than their spouse and/or minor child(ren)*, most of whom remained in Senegal. This proportion includes 6% of partially transnational families, i.e. families in which the migrant lives in Europe with some members of his/her nuclear family, others being left behind in Senegal. These partially transnational families are thus also partially reunified families. The totally reunified families, which account for only 13% of migrants in Europe. The rest of the migrants have always lived in the same country as their spouse and children (19% of “always and totally unified family”), or have no nuclear family at all, i.e. no spouse and no minor child at the time of the survey (24%). The most common case (25% of all family arrangements) is where the migrant is separated from both spouse and children. The other cases are very varied, with the



**Fig. 15.3** Incidence of (re)unified vs. transnational families among Senegalese migrants in Europe

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Time of the survey: 2008; Senegalese migrants in Europe (N = 200 in France, 200 in Spain, 203 in Italy)

Definitions: see Chap. 6, Table 6.19 and Box 6.1

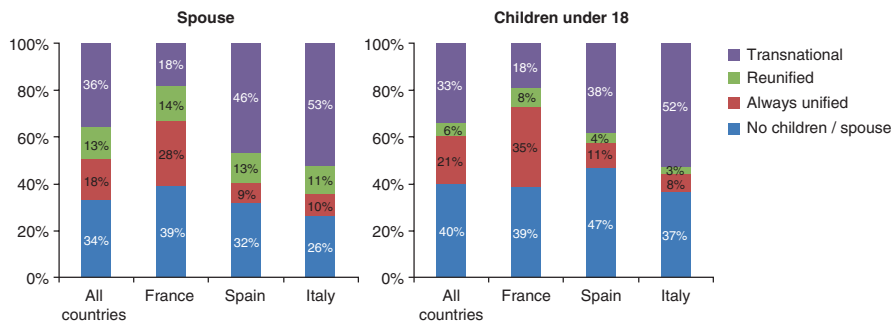
Notes: Weighted percentages

Interpretation: 24% of Senegalese migrants living in Europe (Spain, Italy and France) have no nuclear family, i.e. they have no spouse and no child under 18

Statistical significance: the difference by country is significant ( $p = 0.000$ , Design-based F-test)

migrant living in Europe either with his/her spouse or his/her child(ren), taking into account that some have children but no spouse and some the reverse. When looking separately at spouses and children, it appears that those who live apart are more numerous than those who live united (Fig. 15.4). While 31% live with their spouse at the time of the survey (after a joint migration or after reunification), 36% are not in the same country (34% having no spouse). And while 27% live with their minor child(ren) in Europe, 33% left their child(ren) behind (40% having no child under 18).

These results reflect the average situation of Senegalese migrants in three European countries. In fact their family arrangements vary from one country to another. While Senegalese migrants in Spain and Italy are more often than not living in transnational families (respectively 56 and 66% of all family arrangements, Fig. 15.3), this is the case for only a quarter of those living in France. The very high proportion of transnational families among Senegalese migrants in Italy is consistent with the qualitative literature, which stresses transnational practices much more in this country than in Spain or, especially, France. In the latter country, compared to the other two, reunification appears to be quite common (24% partially or totally reunified, as against 16% and 15% in Spain and Italy). The timing of migration mostly explains this cross-country difference. First, it impacts the policy context: the family reunification policy started to be implemented in France in the 1970s when Senegalese immigration had not yet started in Spain or Italy. Second, for the migrants, reunifying takes time. The Senegalese migrants in France



**Fig. 15.4** Migrants, their spouse and children: living in the same country or apart, across countries?

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Time of the survey: 2008; Senegalese migrants in Europe (N = 200 in France, 200 in Spain, 203 in Italy)

Notes: Weighted percentages

Definitions: see [Chap. 6, Table 6.19](#) and [Box 6.1](#)

Interpretation: 34% of Senegalese migrants living in Europe (Spain, Italy and France) have no nuclear family, i.e. they have no spouse and no child under 18. 18% of them have always lived with their spouse since their marriage

Statistical significance: the difference in residential arrangements by country is significant for spouses and children (in both cases,  $p = 0.000$ , Design-based F-test)

arrived earlier and had more time to prepare for their reunion with their spouse and/or children (Table 15.6).

The timing of migration also explains why the most common family type in France is the family that was never split. Theoretically, these families may result either from a joint migration (members left Senegal together) or from formation at destination. Two facts tend to justify this second possibility. Firstly, the Senegalese community in France is older, larger, and more sex-balanced than in the other countries (Table 15.5), which helps to create a larger matrimonial market at destination. Secondly, migrants in France have, on average, been at destination for longer and so have had more time to form a family there.

*These results contrast with the belief widely shared in Europe that family reunification is the normal path followed by most migrants. It also contrasts with the Westernized view of migration, in which members of a family nucleus – the mother, the father and their children – live together.<sup>4</sup> However, considering how Senegalese families function, these results appear much less surprising.* As explained in the introduction of this paper, multi-residence (of husband vs. wife, of parents vs. children) has long been a common family pattern in Senegal. The development of international migration has extended this residential pattern beyond the country's borders. It may also have reinforced it to some extent, in two ways. Firstly, some migrants explicitly reject the idea of reunification for socio-cultural and economic

<sup>4</sup>In fact this idealized view of the Western family is also increasingly contradicted by the growing complexity of family arrangements in European populations.

**Table 15.5** Senegalese population in France, Italy and Spain

	Spain (all ages)	Italy (all ages)	France (aged 25 and over)
Men	30,234	41,048	52,997
Women	5641	6037	45,530
Total	35,875	47,085	98,527
Percentage of women	16%	13%	46%

Sources: Spain: 2008, Padron; Italy: 2006, Permessi di soggiorno Senegalesi al 1° gennaio; France: 2006, Census data (RRP2004–2007)

reasons (Riccio 2001; Sinatti 2011). Secondly, governments help to keep families transnational by multiplying the restrictions they place on family reunification. *The high prevalence of transnational families is certainly the mixed product of personal (individual or family) choices and policy constraints.* Our data do not provide the basis to clearly disentangle how far transnational arrangements are due to government regulations and how far to personal choice.

### 15.4.2 *Are Migrants in Transnational Families Different from the Others?*

The results of the previous section have shown that Senegalese migrants are quite commonly engaged in transnational families. Is this family situation just a question of timing, a transitory state before reunification? Or are these migrants different in some way from other migrants? To answer this question, we now compare migrants' characteristics according to family type at the time of the survey (reunified vs. transnational), while the next section explores the timing of reunification.

As migrants living in totally reunified families (F2 in Table 15.6), most "transmigrants"<sup>5</sup> (F3) formed their families before they migrated. Thus they left Senegal at a later age than those in an always and totally unified family at the time of the survey (F1), most of whom formed their families at destination. Otherwise, compared to reunified migrants, transmigrants have very specific profiles in two respects. Firstly, far more of them had received some support from their parents (except for those in Spain), which is probably an indicator of their being involved in a community form of migration, which is also known to be associated with a family lifestyle in which living apart is common (see the literature review). Secondly, transmigrants are much more likely than other migrants to be undocumented (18% on average, as against fewer than 1% for the rest, Table 15.6); they are thus not eligible for legal family reunification schemes.

<sup>5</sup>This term was proposed by Riccio (2001) to refer to migrants engaged in a transnational life. Here, we use it to refer to migrants who are part of a transnational nuclear family.



**Table 15.6** Conditions of migration among Senegalese migrants in Europe, by country and type of family arrangement

	All countries	France	Spain	Italy
<b>Age at arrival (mean)</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	26	26	25	25
F2. Totally reunified family	30	31	29	29
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	29	30	30	29
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The age differences between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in France ( $p = 0.001$ ), for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.057$ ) and for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.026$ )				
<b>% of migrants who received some support from their mother and/or father to migrate</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	16%	17%	4%	20%
F2. Totally reunified family	2%	2%	0.0%	3%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	10%	15%	1%	14%
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.001$ ) and for migrants in France ( $p = 0.090$ ), but not for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.380$ ) or for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.224$ )				
<b>% of migrants who did not have a residence permit at the time of the survey</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	0%	0%	0%	0%
F2. Totally reunified family	0%	0%	1%	1%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	18%	11%	25%	16%
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in France ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.001$ ), and for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.000$ )				

Note: weighted percentages

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese immigrants in France ( $n = 146$ ), Italy ( $n = 163$ ), and Spain ( $n = 167$ ), excluding “no nuclear family”). All countries,  $n = 476$

Interpretation: Migrants in an always and totally unified family arrived in Europe at a mean age of 26

The vulnerability of transmigrants is not only legal. It is also reflected in their socio-economic characteristics. They are poorly educated: on average (all countries combined), only 8% of transmigrants have received tertiary education, compared to 20% of reunified migrants (F2) and 36% of those who have never been separated from their nuclear family (F1, Table 15.7). Their low level of education is correlated with their low economic statuses (ISEI) and, quite logically, to poor scores for subjective well-being (Table 15.8). While more than 80% of never-separated (F1) and reunified migrants (F2) declared “yes, absolutely” when asked whether they had enough to live on during their stay in their current country of residence, only 70% of transmigrants gave that answer. *Although these descriptive results do not allow us to infer causality, they tend to corroborate the hypothesis that reunification is more likely to occur among better integrated migrants in Europe* (González-Ferrer et al. 2012; Baizán et al. 2014). And, again, this may result from a dual selection

**Table 15.7** Socio-demographic characteristics of Senegalese migrants in Europe, by country and type of family arrangement

	All countries	France	Spain	Italy
<b>% of women among migrants, by family arrangement type</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	49.7%	53.8%	48.9%	24.8%
F2. Totally reunified family	58.1%	57.0%	64.3%	55.8%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	9.0%	21.3%	5.3%	5.1%

*Statistical significance* (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in France ( $p = 0.001$ ), for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.001$ ), and for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.000$ ).

<b>% of migrants with a tertiary level of education</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	35.7%	43.0%	2.7%	20.2%
F2. Totally reunified family	20.5%	22.0%	3.2%	34.3%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	8.0%	13.3%	3.1%	8.7%

*Statistical significance* (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in France ( $p = 0.002$ ) and for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.011$ ), but not for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.996$ ).

Notes: weighted percentages

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese immigrants in France ( $n = 146$ ), Italy ( $n = 163$ ), and Spain ( $n = 167$ ), excluding “no nuclear family”). All countries,  $n = 476$

Interpretation: 50% of the migrants in an “always and totally unified family” are women

process. On the one hand, government regulations certainly play a role in limiting reunification. This explains, for instance, why reunified migrants almost always have regular legal status, while transmigrants are often undocumented. And since France, Italy and Spain use socio-economic criteria to grant reunification, the differences in the socio-economic characteristics of the various types of migrants may also reflect some effects of government selection. On the other hand, the specific profile of the transmigrants may also indicate the fact that they have distinct migratory rationales and that they (or their families) choose to not reunify. At least some of them have decided to transfer to the international level the family habit of living apart that is already quite common within Senegal. This does not mean, however, that they are the only ones to maintain ties with their origin country. Remitting money is a quite common behavior among migrants in Europe, whatever their family arrangements (Table 15.8), which reminds us – again – of the extended nature of the Senegalese family: even when living with their spouse and children in Europe, migrants continue to send money to their other relatives in Senegal.

**Table 15.8** Socio-economic situation of Senegalese migrants in Europe, by country and type of family arrangement

	All countries	France	Spain	Italy
<b>Occupational status</b>				
Average ISEI (International Socio-Economic Index). ISEI ranks occupations by averaging status characteristics of job holders (education, skills, employment status...)				
F1. Always and totally unified family	37.6	39.0	29.8	35.5
F2. Totally reunified family	32.4	34.8	25.2	29.5
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	28.7	30.2	23.6	31.4
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The differences in the ISEI score between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.000$ ), for migrants in France ( $p = 0.015$ ) and for migrants in Spain ( $p = 0.003$ ), but not for migrants in Italy ( $p = 0.313$ )				
<b>% of migrants declaring “yes, absolutely” to the question “would you say that during this period you had enough to live on?”</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	82.0%	84.4%	55.8%	90.5%
F2. Totally reunified family	85.8%	94.4%	44.7%	98.8%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	70.4%	78.4%	41.9%	86.4%
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are significant when all countries are combined ( $p = 0.003$ ), but not in specific countries (France, $p = 0.127$ ; Italy, $p = 0.380$ ; Spain, $p = 0.530$ )				
<b>% who answered that they regularly send money during their stay in their current country of residence</b>				
F1. Always and totally unified family	92.6%	96.0%	85.9%	77.7%
F2. Totally reunified family	89.5%	96.1%	80.9%	72.8%
F3. Partially or totally transnational family	89.7%	100.0%	86.8%	86.3%
<i>Statistical significance</i> (F tests, one way anova): The differences in percentages between migrants according to their family type are not significant (all countries, $p = 0.637$ ; France, $p = 0.733$ ; Italy, $p = 0.320$ ; Spain, $p = 0.769$ )				

Note: weighted percentages

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Time of Survey: 2008; Population: Senegalese immigrants in France ( $n = 146$ ), Italy ( $n = 163$ ), and Spain ( $n = 167$ ), excluding “no nuclear family”). All countries,  $n = 476$

Interpretation: 80.5% of migrants in an always or totally unified family were economically active at the time of the survey

## 15.5 The Formation and Evolution of Transnational Families

In this last section, our aim is to give an account of the process of family formation in a context of international migration. We set out to answer to two basic questions. How are transnational families formed? And how are they transformed into

reunified families? Our analyses are again restricted to family nuclei, i.e. to the migrants' spouses and children aged under 18, since these two categories correspond to those who are eligible for formal family reunification under the laws of most European countries. For the sake of clarity, we look at couples and children separately.

### 15.5.1 *Couples*

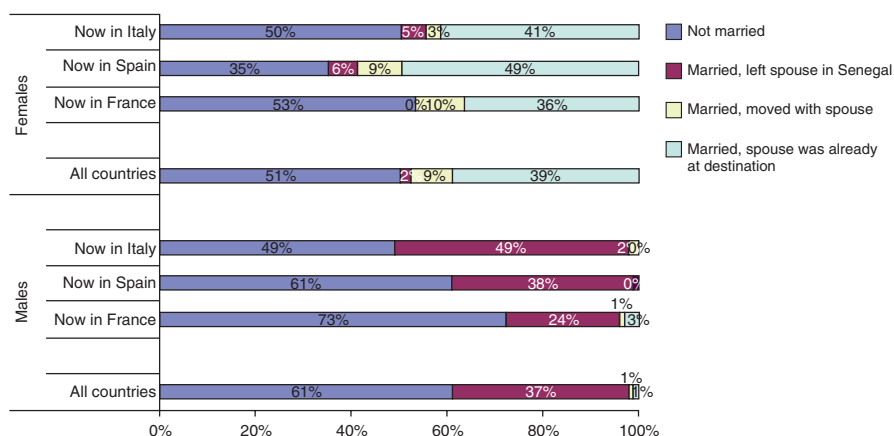
For a start, it is important to stress that most adult migrants are not married when they first out-migrate (analyses are limited to migrants aged over 18 at the time of migration). On average, two thirds of male migrants are single when they leave Senegal, with some variations according to destination country (73% of unmarried men among those arriving in France but only 49% in Italy (Fig. 15.5)).<sup>6</sup> Men without any family commitments can probably move more easily; further, migration is sometimes seen as a way to accumulate the necessary money to start a family in Senegal. More surprisingly in a context where social control over women is strong, a high proportion of female migrants are also unmarried when they leave Senegal for the first time, with proportions of unmarried women varying from 35% in Spain to 53% in France (Fig. 15.5). Among the average proportion of 51% unwedded women (taking the three destination countries as a whole), only 5% are engaged in a consensual union, the others being single (34%), divorced (11%),<sup>7</sup> or – more rarely – widowed (1%, Table 15.9). Whether these results reflect the development of “autonomous” female migration in Senegal is uncertain. In any case, it shows that female migrants are far from being only reunified wives.

Among those who were married before migration, very few moved jointly with their spouse (only 9% of female migrants and 1% of male, Fig. 15.5). In married couples, husbands typically moved abroad leaving their wife behind. 37% of all male migrants were in this situation when they left Senegal for the first time, while 39% of female migrants to Europe moved there to join their husbands. The reverse configuration is not completely impossible: 5% of female migrants in Italy and 6% of those in Spain were the first movers in their couple and left their husband in

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<sup>6</sup>At least two things can explain the high proportion of bachelors among Senegalese men arriving in France. The first is related to the organization of migration among the first wave of migrants: origin communities deliberately organized the departure of young male migrants (see above the literature review). The second concerns the more recent waves of migrants, among whom students are increasingly numerous (see also Chap. 13).

<sup>7</sup>Interestingly, the proportion of divorced women is much higher than the proportion of divorced men at the time of migration (11% against 2%) and also increases after migration. This suggests that there is a significant relationship between the experience of international migration and the social status of women in Senegalese society.



**Fig. 15.5** Marriage and migration at the time of 1st migration

\* Not married includes: singles, informal unions, divorcees and widowed

Note: weighted percentages

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese immigrants in Europe (n = 603); Time of survey: 2008

Interpretation: At the time of 1st migration, 65% of men and 53% of women were not married. Statistical significance: Differences between countries are significant among women (P = 0.0006) and men: (P = 0.0044); differences between men and women (all countries) are significant (P = 0.0000). Design-based F test

**Table 15.9** Marital status of Senegalese migrants in Europe, by sex

Marital status	Male migrants		Female migrants	
	At the time of 1st migration	At the time of the survey	At the time of 1st migration	At the time of the survey
Single	52%	19%	34%	26%
Consensual union	7%	7%	5%	4%
Married	39%	63%	49%	46%
Divorced	2%	11%	11%	17%
Widowed	0%	0%	1%	8%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	330	330	273	273

Notes: weighted percentages & unweighted numbers

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: All Senegalese immigrants (n = 603)

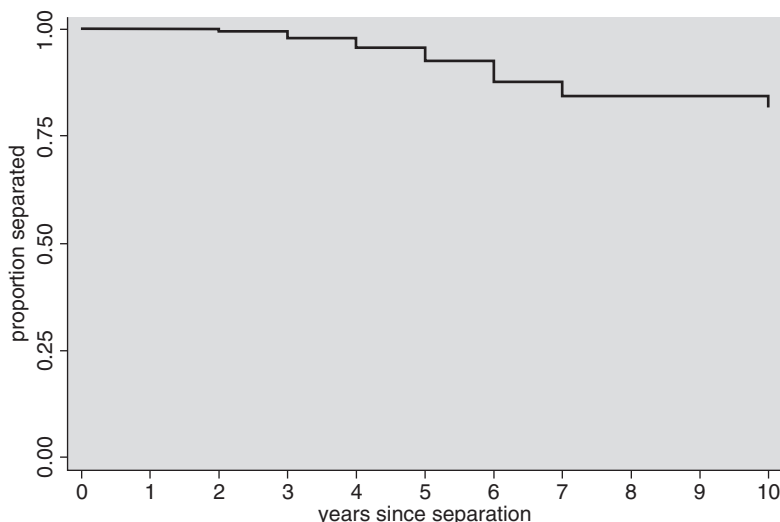
Interpretation: 52% of the male migrants in Europe were single when they first migrated. Only 19.1% were still single at the time of the survey (2008)

Statistical significance: Male-Female differences are significant at time of 1st migration (P = 0.000) and at time of survey (P = 0.000). Design-based F test

Senegal. Albeit small, these numbers are maybe a sign of the emergence of autonomous female migration. Transnational couples can thus be formed when either one or the other spouse leaves Senegal to go abroad. In these cases, the marriage occurred before migration. But transnational couples can also be formed when the marriage occurs after migration; this is the case when a migrant already at destination marries somebody in his/her origin country. It is actually a quite common phenomenon among Senegalese migrants: 50% of transnational couples (married or not, i.e. consensual unions included) registered in MAFE were formed this way (Baizán et al. 2014).

To what extent do transnational couples become reunified couples in Europe? Conventional data in destination countries give usually few insights on this question because they are more often than not focused on migrants at destination, which creates two limitations. Firstly, they rarely contain information on those left behind, so that they cannot be used to compute the proportion of reunified vs. transnational couples. Secondly, they record no information on migrants who have returned and so cannot be used to give an account of reunification at both origin (Senegal) and destination (Europe). Furthermore, they are usually cross-sectional and so do not allow a study of how couples evolve over time from a transnational to a reunified state. The transnational and longitudinal nature of the MAFE data overcomes these limitations. Basically, what the MAFE data allows is to broaden the focus on family reunification. Rather than legal reunification, we look at *de facto* reunification. Reunification is thus defined as the fact of living together again (in the same country) after a period of separation due to international migration, regardless of legal channel for immigration to Europe (the legal status of the reunified migrant could be “student” or “worker” or any other status, and not only a status linked to legal reunification). Furthermore, with the MAFE data, reunification is not only seen from the European point of view: we also look at reunification at origin (i.e. in Senegal) to test whether the common wisdom that all migrants aim to regroup their family in Europe is accurate or not.

Figure 15.6 shows the proportion of transnational couples (i.e. couples composed of two spouses living in different countries, one at destination in France, Italy or Spain and the other in Senegal) who evolve into reunified couples in Europe. (On the computation of survivor functions, see Box 1 in Chap. 6). We examine at what rate couples reunify (or not) over a period of 10 years after their geographical separation. After 5 years of separation, approximately 7% of the migrants had reunified with their spouse (i.e. 93% are still separated on Fig. 15.6); after 10 years, the proportion reaches 18%. *This shows clearly that living apart across borders is, in most cases, a long-standing couple arrangement.* Interestingly, there are almost no differences in the timing of reunification according to the sex of the migrant: when they are the first to migrate in their couple, the wives do not “call” their husband over much sooner than husbands do when they are the first to move (gender differences in Fig. 15.7 are not significant).



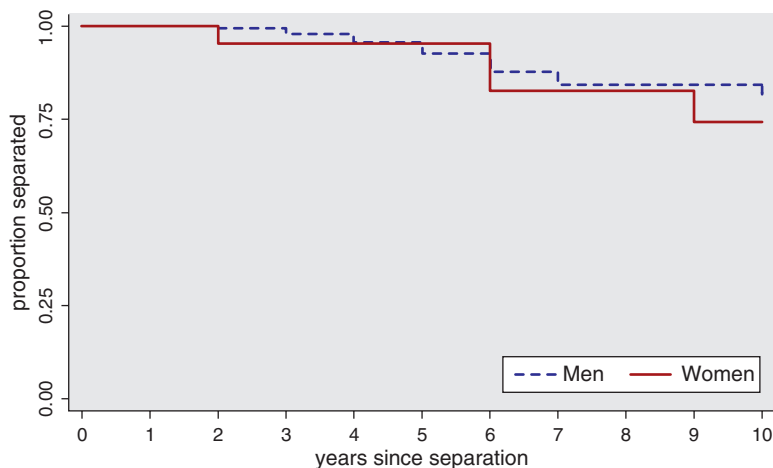
**Fig. 15.6** Time to reunification in Europe of Senegalese couples (survivor function)

Note: Weighted results

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese migrants living in Europe at the time of the survey who have experienced a period of separation from their spouse because of migration (they moved out of Senegal, leaving their spouse behind). Note that the sample used here does not include migrants who, after migrating, married someone who was still living in Senegal ( $n = 154$ )

Interpretation: The figures measure the duration between time of a married couple's separation and their time of reunification in Europe. After 2 years, 99% are still separated, this proportion being 93% after 5 years and 82% after 10 years. Statistical significance: Differences between men and women are not significant (Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 0.44$ ;  $\text{Pr} > \chi^2 = 0.5077$ )

Do Senegalese migrants reunify more often (and more quickly) in Europe than in Senegal? In Fig. 15.8, we examine the difference between the chances of reunifying at destination (i.e. in Europe) and the chances of reunifying at origin (i.e. in Senegal), among migrants who either still reside in Europe or used to live there before returning to Senegal. In our sample of 172 migrants who live or used to live in Europe, and who were separated from their spouse because of their departure from Senegal, 21 reunified at destination and 16 at origin. Observing the timing of reunification, it appears that reunification at origin (i.e. in Senegal) is a quite short-term process, likely to occur within the five first years after the couples' geographical separation, with the proportion of reunified couples reaching 13% after 5 years (followed by a slow increase to 14% after 10 years). Reunification in Europe appears to be a longer process: after 5 years of separation, 7% of transnational couples have reunified at destination; the proportion keeps rising, reaching 16% after 10 years. In other words, over the long term, married couples are more likely to reunify in Europe, which is consistent with the fact that return is much more likely to occur within a decade after migration (Baizán et al. 2014). In any case, it remains that *reunification at origin is a significant phenomenon which contradicts the common wisdom that all African migrants in Europe come for good and to be joined by their whole family.*



**Fig. 15.7** Time to reunification of couples, by sex of the migrant

Note: Weighted results

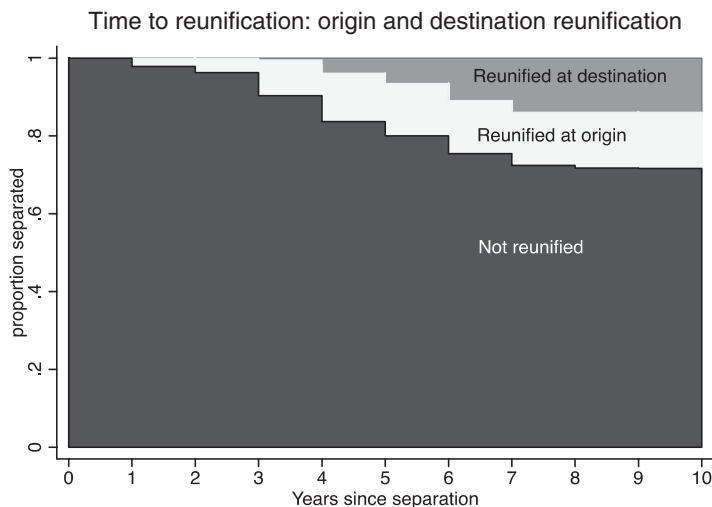
Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese migrants living in Europe at the time of the survey who have experienced a period of separation from their spouse because of migration (they moved out of Senegal, leaving their spouse behind). Note that the sample used here does not include migrants who, after migrating, married someone who was still living in Senegal ( $n = 154$ )

Interpretation: The figures measure the duration between time of a married couple's separation and their time of reunification in Europe. After 2 years, 99% are still separated, this proportion being 93% after 5 years and 82% after 10 years. Statistical significance: Differences between men and women are not significant (Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 0.44$ ;  $\Pr > \chi^2 = 0.5077$ )

### 15.5.2 Children

Most migrants being unmarried at the time of their first migration, not many of them have children when they leave Senegal. Again gender differences are discernible in several respects. More women than men have children before migrating, although the proportion of mothers remains low among migrants (16%, as against 13% of fathers among male migrants, Fig. 15.9). Compared to male migrants, female migrants' family situations vary more between destination countries: the percentage of women with minor children ranges from 12% in France to 33% in Italy, but the corresponding percentage of men varies only between 7% in France and 17% in Italy. The family situations of women with children are also more varied than for men: while almost all fathers leave their child(ren) in Senegal, more migrant mothers move with them (7% of all women migrants leave their child(ren) behind, and the same proportion migrate with them, Fig. 15.9). Italy emerges as an exception, with female migrants adopting transnational strategies much more often than in the other European countries: a quarter of them leave their child(ren) behind, as against





**Fig. 15.8** Time to reunification: couples, by country of reunification

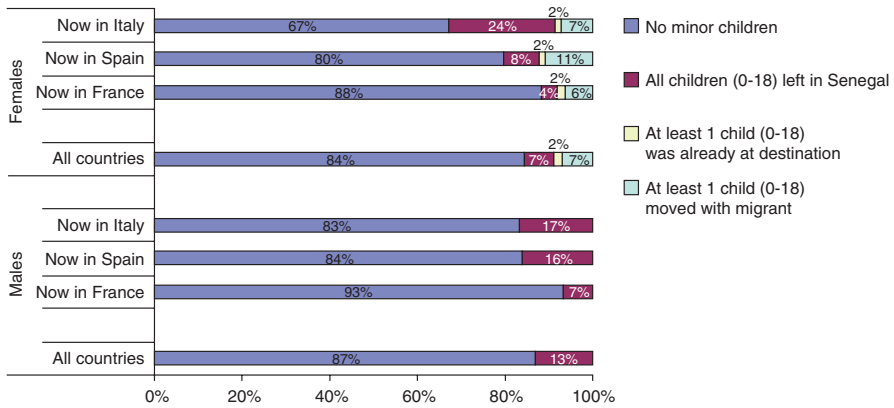
Note: weighted results

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese migrants living in Europe or back in Senegal at the time of the survey who have experienced a period of separation from their spouse because of migration (they moved out of Senegal, leaving their spouse behind) ( $n = 172$ ). Note that the sample used here does not include migrants who, after migrating, married someone who was still living in Senegal

Interpretation: The figure measures the duration between time of married couples' separation and time of reunification either in Europe (at destination) or in Senegal (at origin). After 2 years of separation (i.e. after one of the partners has moved to Europe), 1% have reunified at destination and 3% at origin. After 5 years, 7% have reunified at destination in Europe, this proportion being 16% after 10 years. After 5 years, 13% have reunified at origin in Senegal, this proportion being 14% after 10 years

4% of the women in France (Fig. 15.9). The phenomenon of “transmigration” described in the literature on Senegalese male migration in Italy (Riccio 2006; Sinatti 2011) also applies to women (Fig. 15.10).

Finally, when migrant mothers do not move with their children, they are significantly more likely to reunify than the fathers, and they do so much sooner (Fig. 15.11). As with couples, it is important to bear in mind that reunification between parents and children does not only occur in Europe. In fact, *reunification with children occurs sooner and more often in Senegal, with the migrant returning, than in Europe with children joining their parent at destination*. After 5 years of separation, 7% of the parent-child dyads have reunified in Europe, as against 14% in Senegal. And after 10 years, the probabilities of reunification are 10% in Europe and 23% in Senegal (Fig. 15.12). Again *these results show that reunification in Europe is not always the preferred option of Senegalese migrants, even though family reunion has become the main legal channel of entry into Europe*.



**Fig. 15.9** Children and migration of Senegalese migrants currently living in Europe, at time of first migration

\*Children over 18 are not included in the analyses

Note: weighted percentages

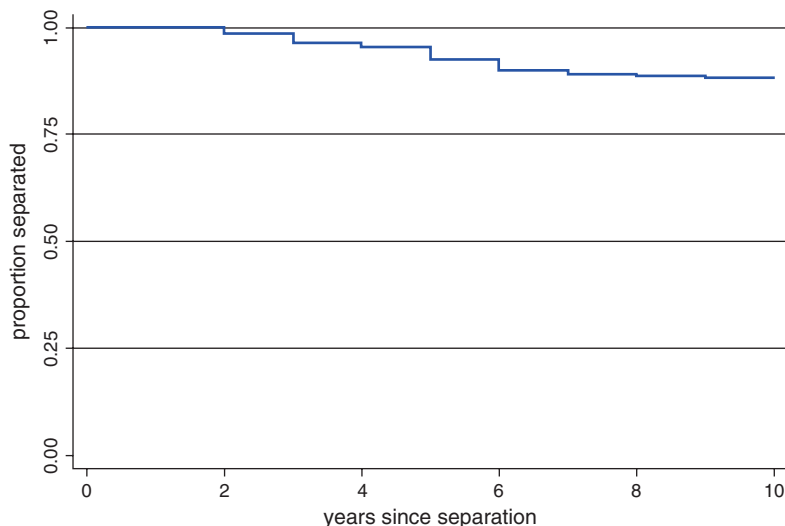
Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese immigrants in Europe (n = 603); Time of survey: 2008

Interpretation: At the time of 1st migration, 87% of men had no minor children. For women, this was 84%

Statistical significance: Differences between countries are significant among women (P = 0.0006) and men: (P = 0.043); differences between men and women (all countries) are significant (P = 0.0000). Design-based F test

## 15.6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have used the MAFE data to study the relationships between migration and family in the context of Senegal and Europe. While most previous quantitative studies are biased because they offer a view limited either to origin or to destination, we took advantage of the transnational nature of the data to offer a dual viewpoint on families, from origin *and* destination countries. This led us to a first important result: *transnational families are very common*. Using the data collected at origin, we have shown that half of all households from the region of Dakar declared migrants abroad (whatever their place of residence) and that they have strong connections with them through various channels (social contacts, money or other material remittances). Importantly, these contacts do not only concern spouses and children but also members of the extended family. Even when adopting a restrictive (and European) perspective on family, by focusing on nuclear rather than extended families, transnational arrangements remain a common fact. Using the



**Fig. 15.10** Time to reunification: parent-child dyads

Note: weighted results

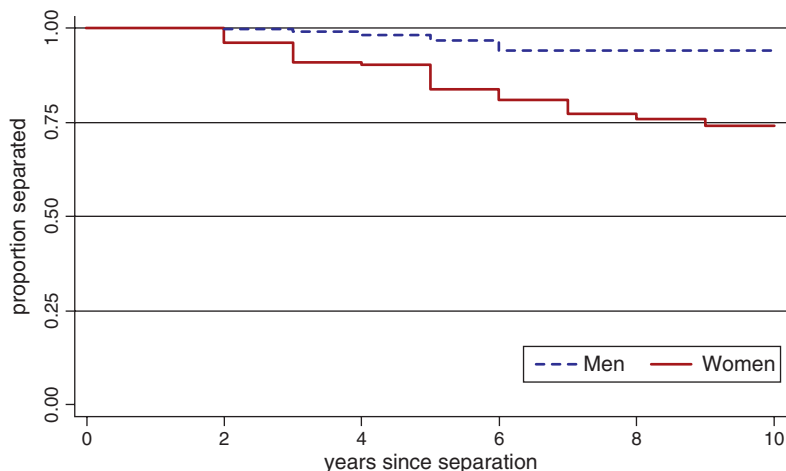
Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese migrants living in Europe at the time of the survey who have experienced a period of separation from their child(ren) because of migration. N = 569 parent-child dyads consisting of migrant with children aged under 18 at the time of migration. These dyads are distributed across 221 migrant parents, who have on average 4.05 (sd 2.2) children (range 1-12). Note that the sample used here does not include children born in Senegal after the first departure of one of the parents (usually the father)

Interpretation: The probability of staying separated is 99% after 2 years, 92% after 5 years and still 88% after 10 years. In other words, after 2 years of separation, 1% of the migrants had reunified with their child, the proportion being 7% after 5 years and 12% after 10 years. For men, the proportion of separated dyads is 100% after 2 years, 97% after 5 years, and 94% after 10 years. For women, the proportion of separated dyads is 96% after 2 years, 84% after 5 years, and 74% after 10 years

Statistical significance: Differences between men and women are significant (Wald  $\chi^2(1) = 33.91$ ;  $\text{Pr} > \chi^2 = 0.0000$ ).

data collected in Europe among Senegalese migrants, we have shown that transnational families are clearly more numerous than (re)unified ones. We have further demonstrated that *living apart across borders is quite often a long-lasting arrangement for Senegalese couples, as well as for their children.*

A second very important finding is that *reunification is not a one-directional phenomenon.* In line with the MAFE results showing that return migration is a significant phenomenon, although on the decrease in recent decades (see [Chap. 13](#)), we wanted to test the hypothesis that reunification can occur at origin (i.e. in Senegal) and not only in Europe. We thus rejected a legalistic view of reunification based on spouses' entry into Europe, adopting instead a factual definition, simply comparing



**Fig. 15.11** Time to reunification: parent-child dyads, by sex of the migrant

Notes: see Fig. 15.10

the places of residence of the migrant and his/her spouse and child(ren). Observing them over the life course, from the time of separation (when the migrant moved out of Senegal, leaving his/her family behind) until the time of reunification (or the time of the survey if they were not reunited by that time), we have shown that *reunification at origin is a quite common phenomenon both for spouses and for children*. It is only when migrants have stayed in Europe a significant number of years (6 years of separation from partners, 10 years of separation from children) that reunification becomes more likely at destination, although reunification in Senegal remains an option.

The big remaining question is: what makes some migrants remain separated from their family long-term, others reunify in Europe and others again go back in Senegal to meet up there with their spouses and children? This question cannot be answered with the results presented in this paper. Other research has shown that migrants with higher odds of reunifying in Europe are the more Westernized ones (in terms of social norms) and the more economically integrated (González-Ferrer et al. 2012; Baizán et al. 2014). It is still not entirely clear whether this is the result of personal choice or of contextual opportunities connected with the legal framework for reunification in Europe. The anthropological literature suggests that living apart is a common fact for Senegalese families even in the absence of international migration. It could be that transnational families are at least partly the result of an internationalization of this habit. On the other hand, the fact that undocumented migrants are likely to be in transnational families suggests that the policy context cannot be ignored. The differences observed between countries (with a higher proportion of transnational families in Italy, for instance) also call for further



**Fig. 15.12** Time to reunification: parent-child dyads, country of reunification

Note: weighted results

Source: MAFE-Senegal data; Population: Senegalese migrants living in Europe or back in Senegal at the time of the survey who have experienced a period of separation from their child(ren) because of migration. In all, there are 673 parent-child dyads (parents with children aged under 18 at the time of migration). These dyads are distributed across 246 migrant parents, who have on average 4.39 (sd 2.4) children (range 1-14). Note that the sample used here does not include children born in Senegal after the first departure of one of the parents (usually the father)

Interpretation: The figure measures the duration between time of separation of parent-child dyads and time of reunification either in Europe (at destination) or in Senegal (at origin). At destination: after 2 years, 0.6% reunified; after 5 years, 7.5% reunified; after 10 years, 9.7% reunified. At origin: after 2 years, 1.4% are reunified; after 5 years, 13.6% reunified; after 10 years, 22.6% reunified

research to take into account the effects of national policies on the reunification process. To what extent is reunification in Europe or in Africa self-selected and to what extent the result of official selection? This is the next question to be solved.

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