

Title:

Transnational Families versus Family Reunification. Who follows whom, when, where and why? New evidence from migration between Senegal and Europe

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Short Abstract

Policy makers in most European receiving countries express a great concern about reunification of migrants' families. At the same time, migration scholars have increasingly focused their attention on the phenomenon of transnational families. A myriad of in-depth qualitative case-studies have drawn attention to the great diversity and fluidity of transnational families. But, so far, quantitative evidence is scarce. It is not clear yet when and why some transnational families evolve into reunified immigrant families, and whether reunification is more likely to be accomplished at the destination or the origin country. This is what the present paper aims to explore by utilising life-course retrospective data on Senegalese migrants and their families. Namely, we will examine which are the main factors that affect the probability of Senegalese migrants of living together with their partners in either the origin or the destination country, after a migration-related separation period.

Our analyses will use the new data of the MAFE-Senegal project (Migration between Africa and Europe, 2008). This dataset is especially suited to the study of family arrangements across borders for two reasons. First, it contains data collected both in Dakar among non-migrants and return migrants, and among Senegalese migrants in their main European destinations (France, Italy and Spain). Second, for all these individuals, the questionnaire was designed to collect longitudinal retrospective information, including a large range of information on housing and occupation histories of the interviewed persons, as well as on their family history (children, partnerships). Interestingly, the questionnaire includes a whole module on the international migrations of the interviewee relatives, in addition of the modules describing his/her personal experience of international migration (when he/she has lived at least 12 months outside Senegal). Thus, the nature of the data allows us to perform event-history analysis in order to study the determinants of family reunification.

Long Abstract***Background and objective of the paper***

Policy makers in most European receiving countries continue worrying about family reunification entries and how to restrict them, while migration scholars have increasingly focused their attention on the phenomenon of transnational families, especially among African and Latin-American communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova & Louie 2002, Suárez-Orozco 2008, Bledsoe 2008, Riccio 2001, Rodriguez-García 2006, Lindstrom & Saucedo, forthcoming). Transnational families are claimed to be different from the ordinary immigrant family; their defining characteristic being not the act of crossing the border but rather the dispersion of the family across nation states without sacrificing a sense of collective welfare and unity (Bryceson & Vorela 2002). A myriad of in-depth qualitative case-studies have drawn attention to the great internal diversity and fluidity of transnational families, which derives not only from the periodical coming and goings of new immigrants and returnees, but also from the mouldable working and living arrangements of their members (Zontini 2002).

Such an emphasis on their mutability along with the scarcity of large longitudinal surveys of migrant families have largely prevented to establish so far which are the predominant patterns of transnationalism among different groups, and which sort of changes in transnational arrangements are more likely to take place as time of separation prolongs. In particular, it is not clear yet when and why some transnational families evolve into reunified immigrant families, and whether reunification is more likely to be accomplished at the destination or the origin country. This is precisely what the present paper aims to explore by utilising life-course retrospective data on Senegalese migrants and their families. Namely, we will examine which are the main factors that affect the probability of Senegalese migrants of living

together with their partners in either the origin or the destination country, after a migration-related separation period.

Data

The analyses performed in this paper will rely on a new data source extracted from the MAFE-Senegal project (Migration between Africa and Europe)¹, which is aimed at filling the gap, largely admitted, in data availability on African international migration (Lucas, 2006; Hatton, 2004). We collected data both in Dakar among non-migrants and return migrants, and among Senegalese migrants in their main European destinations (France, Italy and Spain). In total, 1,500 individuals were randomly selected in Dakar -including 200 return migrants and 200 migrants' spouses-, and 600 migrants were interviewed in Europe (200 in each of the selected country). Data collection was performed in 2008. The questionnaire was designed to collect longitudinal retrospective information (on a yearly basis from birth until the time of survey) for each sampled individual, whatever his/her country of residence at the time of the survey. The data collected include a large range of information on housing and occupation histories of the interviewed persons, as well as on their family history (children, partnerships). Interestingly, the questionnaire includes a whole module on the international migrations of the interviewee relatives, in addition of the modules describing his/her personal experience of international migration (when he/she has lived at least 12 months outside Senegal). For all these reasons, the resulting dataset constitutes a very rich and well-equipped source for the empirical analyses of the transnational dimension of family life.

Methods

Our analyses will be focused on the Senegalese people who have been involved in a couple in which at least one partner has experienced international migration at some point in his/her life (either to Europe or to the rest of Africa). Thus, we will distinguish two types of samples:

- Sample A: people who were left behind by their partner at one point of their life, whatever their country of residence at the time of the survey (i.e. partners of current migrants but also partners of return migrants) and,
- Sample B: people who left behind their partner at one point in their life, i.e. people who experienced international migration themselves (i.e. current migrants but also return migrants at the time of the survey).

In order to identify the determinants of reunification for transnational couples, we will use two multinomial logit models for discrete-time event history analysis: one will be applied to the left behind sample (A), the other one to the sample of migrants (B). The outcomes of the two models will be identical, as follows: 1) living together in the country of destination, 2) living together in the country of origin and, 3) not living together.

Note that event history analysis will allow us to examine the role of time (since separation) in easing (or hampering) some family arrangements versus others, in addition of other time-varying explanatory variables. Some variables will be of special interest to explain the probability of reunification at destination or origin: the family situation (number and location of the children; duration of the couple at separation); the migration experience (legal status, length of residence at destination, occupation, housing condition, etc.); and the period (to capture the effect of policy measures in matter of international migration and especially in matter of reunification).

References

¹ The Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE-Senegal) survey is a project coordinated by INED (France), in association with the Institut de Population, Développement et Santé de la Reproduction of the University of Dakar (IPDSR, Senegal). It also involves the Pompeu Fabra university (UPF, Spain) and the Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'immigrazione (FIERI, Italy). The survey was conducted with the support of the Agence nationale de la recherche (ANR, France), the Ile de France Region, the Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD, France), the Centre population et développement (CEPED, France) and the FSP programme entitled 'International Migrations, territorial reorganizations and development of the countries of the South. The MAFE-Senegal project is now being enlarged to Ghanaian and Congolese Migrations

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