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***Local Continuity and Change: Perspectives of  
Senegalese Marriage Dynamics***

**by**

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## **Introduction**

This paper focuses on recent changes in nuptiality amongst Wolof in north-west Senegal, critical because much of the recent Senegalese fertility decline is a consequence of marriage delay. We consider the particular dimensions of marriage which have changed in recent years and what aspects have remained more constant. It is clear that the marriage process is tightly related to the social, economic and cultural environment in which it takes place. Hence, tendencies may be similar all over a country – say the postponement of marriage by both men and women – but such trends may mask contrasting local processes of change. It is essential to take a gendered perspective of the new marriage dynamics since most of the decision making power in this domain lies with men who usually initiate the marriage process yet men perceive it to be women – both the potential spouses and their mothers – whose financial demands are contributing to their inability to marry.

Constant, over space, over time and for men and women, is the fact that reproduction is the primordial aim of marriage both for its own sake and for old-age security. The importance of reproduction for individuals, households and, indeed, the whole of society means that the idea of marriage as a general goal for everybody remains unquestioned. The changes are occurring within the supplementary non-reproductive goals of marriage, the costs and benefits of the institution for individuals and households, and the role of the wider kin group in the marriage process. The fundamental role of reproduction in marriage is not changing but there is evidence that some of the urban Senegalese are participating in a transformation from reproduction as of critical importance to the wider kin group, the mode of recruiting new (and appropriately pedigreed members) to a reproduction that itself is becoming more individualised. Given the constancy of reproduction in marriage we will refrain from repeatedly discussing this aspect below.

The main transformation of Senegalese marriage in the last thirty years has been the delay in marriage for both men and women (Pison et al, 1995; Ndiaye et al, 1997; Antoine & Djire 1998). It is not yet clear whether this will eventually lead to substantial proportions of the adult population never marrying.. This postponement is most marked in the urban areas but is also being experienced in more rural zones. It can be conceptualised in two main ways: either people are choosing not to marry or at least are choosing to initiate marriage at older ages or they are encountering a range of obstacles which are preventing them from marrying at the ages which were the norm for previous generations.

In order to capture diversity in the local changes and dynamics of the marriage process as well as new patterns in the relationship between marriage and initiating reproduction, three contrasting Wolof communities were studied. We show how, for these three communities, there are elements of both choice and obstacles in the new timing of marriage and how these operate in different ways for men and women.

## **Data and methods**

Qualitative data were collected in 1999 in a village, a small town and two largely Wolof areas in central Dakar. In total 122 in-depth interviews with men and women of different ages and marital statuses focused on respondents' personal biographies including marital and reproductive histories as well as their reproductive goals and

decision making. Background information on childhood, education and professional trajectories was also collected. In addition 14 focus groups complemented the individual biographies and 9 interviews with couples (interviewed separately) in Dakar concentrated on couple dynamics and reproductive decision making. The contrasting sites were chosen in order to understand how the socio-economic conditions can shape attitudes and behaviours related to couple formation, contraceptive use, sexuality, and reproductive goals. Interviews were conducted by Senegalese graduates, tape recorded and translated into French. All matched the sex of interviewer and interviewee.

### **Marriage constants in North West Senegal**

Marriage is a major preoccupation of most people and the majority are experiencing changes in nuptiality over which they feel they have little control. Marriage remains a fundamental cornerstone of society with socially sanctioned reproduction being its primary function. Everybody expects to marry and have children someday with marriage a crucial dimension of achieving full adult personhood. Kinship and kin networks remain an important dimension of social organisation and support and are closely implicated in marriage strategies although these are beginning to conflict with ideas of individual choice and autonomy which are part of the new modern, urban, cosmopolitan values. In rural areas most marriages still occur within the kin group and are often arranged by the families albeit with the couples' consent. In urban areas kin marriages are less common, although they have by no means disappeared, but kin support for the marriage process remains essential and patrilocal residence still occurs, if less frequently. Everywhere economic constraints tend to delay first marriage but whereas these are mainly the costs of actual marriage in the village and small town, in Dakar housing is the main obstacle. Polygamy is widespread but with different patterns of wife acquisition and residence according to the context. Hence the common features that link these people together are nuanced according to the different settings.

There are a range of factors contributing to the changes in Senegalese marriage, all of which are interrelated and therefore it is impossible to isolate individual causes and effect. Basically all the processes of modernisation, of increasing monetarisation and the development of a more consumerist society, the transformation of the economy from subsistence farming into a more modern economy coupled with both rural-urban and international migration have transformed the basic resources needed for marriage, the different expectations that individuals and society have from marriage as well as the role of labour exchange (through the movement of women) in marriage. Modern education, modern health care and the media have also contributed to generating different perspectives on individual level marital behaviour.

From our data two comparative perspectives are possible. Firstly we can use the interview material from older people and contrast their life histories, biographies and attitudes with those of younger individuals. Secondly by comparing the three communities which are at different stages in the whole modernisation process we can examine the degree to which both the recalled marital behaviour and individuals' observations on marriage differ. Both approaches have their limitations: individual recall of changes can be very unreliable and seriously distorted by personal experience and also by nostalgia for a rosy past. They also tend to emphasise normative behaviour – what 'should have been done' rather than the reality of what

actually happened. Other distortions occur with cross-sectional contemporary data when individuals reconfigure their accounts of past events in the light of present situations. Issues influencing the interpretation of change from the cross-sectional data arise mainly from the fact that the village is taken to represent a pre-transitional rural subsistence agriculture economy, whereas in reality the villagers are as much a part of the modern late 20<sup>th</sup> century as those in the urban areas. They too are exposed to taxes, monetarisation, substantial rural-urban migration and changes in the marriage regime and it would be erroneous to imagine the village as an isolated, unchanging pre-twentieth century enclave. Nevertheless, at the time of the study a primary school had only been open in one of the several village hamlets for one year, standpipes had been installed in a couple of hamlets during the preceding 12 months but most people still obtained water from wells, there was one battery-run black and white television and, for most households, a principal economic activity remained subsistence rain-fed agriculture with some livestock raising. This situation contrasted strongly with the small town on a main arterial road, with several schools and a newly opened *lycee*, a health centre, substantial numbers of professionally qualified workers and good communications and infrastructure.

In discussing the changing dynamics of nuptiality we combine these two perspectives. We use people's statements to build up accounts of different trends in the three sites, depending on the accounts as indicators of what actually happens. We also use them to represent<sup>1</sup> particular dilemmas, perceptions or associations. Often a single quotation is able to demonstrate the multiple layers of responsibilities to other people, events, constraints and cultural values that individuals are juggling whilst trying to manage their own lives. Interview quotations are used liberally, usually representing themes which occurred regularly. Occasionally a quote is used to demonstrate an unusual situation or perception – in which case this will be made clear. Detailed commentary on the quotes is not made – we expect the reader to note and judge for themselves the various associations made. We are fully aware of the range of dynamics at work in representing people's behaviour through their responses in in-depth interviews (for a detailed discussion see Randall and Koppenhaver, 2004).

### *Change and continuity in the village*

#### **Choice of spouse:**

In the village most marriages within living memory were between kin with relatives facilitating the marriage. Many of the unmarried expected to marry kin, although there was also the hope, for girls at least, that there would be an element of 'love' in the marriage, which was not excluded from kin marriages. Marrying kin was an accepted consequence of a good upbringing, demonstrating obedience, morality and respect for correct family values and the older generation.

*(woman, age 48) For young, well brought up young people it's their parents who organise their marriage..... because the child must always ask its father or mother 'what should I do?, which route shall I take?'. Like that he is told 'go to this*

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<sup>1</sup> Clearly these representations are also mediated by translation. Most interviews were undertaken in Wolof and translated and transcribed into French by the interviewer shortly afterwards. They have then been translated into English for this paper. Where possible we have tried to recreate the tone of the French and can only hope that this represents the tone in Wolof.

*household and there you can find a wife' or he is told ' wait here – I will go myself to look for a wife for you and I will tell you what has been decided'.*

Traditionally a young man would go to his father expressing a desire to marry and his father would indicate in which related households he should seek a bride.

*(man, age 59) Everything depends on your kin, especially for the first wife. It is your kin who direct you, they show you the family where you will find a wife. Afterwards you go and look for a wife and if she agrees, your kin will discuss with your future in-laws.*

Most of the older villagers and many of the younger ones had been through this process, and others expected to do so. There are many benefits of kin marriage. They reinforce links and relationships but were also expected to be more stable, because kin would mediate in quarrels and disputes – certainly no cases of divorce emerged from the village interviews. Patrilocal residence meant that the bride came to live with her in-laws who, if they were kin, frequently knew her well beforehand.

However older women were expressing concern that their sons, most of whom left the village on labour migration, might choose their wives themselves:

*(woman, age 27) His parents were against it, they didn't want their son to marry out. He ought to find his wife here, in the locality, in their village. He was supposed to marry one of his uncle's daughters. In his family men only marry their cousins but he refused, he wanted to marry me...or nobody. Faced with such resolution his uncle and my uncle did what was necessary for the marriage..... but his parents were totally against.....*

For younger men new possibilities of spousal choice, associated with changes in the timing of first marriage, are a consequence of the economic crisis in rural areas and the increase in temporary out-migration to earn cash. In contrast to the past, this financial autonomy endows them with more agency over when and whom to marry:

*(man aged 66) ... before when a person was the right age to marry their kin looked for a cousin, without them knowing. Now this parental authority has disappeared. Now the individual can do everything to do with marriage without their kin knowing anything about it. There is too much liberty today. Today people marry because they have the chance, if you have your money you marry even if your kin disagree. that's the difference.*

Although marrying non-kin was generally seen as more or less acceptable for sons, few were inclined to let daughters choose their husband although it was unclear whether this was because they wanted to be certain of the household where their daughter would end up living or just to retain traditional control over her behaviour.

*(woman, age 38)*

*R. In that case we respect his decision. If she's a good girl we let him marry her. But if she is neither kin nor a good girl we will oppose it and he will renounce the marriage. The same thing for a daughter, if the intended is kin, we will give her in marriage. If he is not kin we will turn him away and he'll leave.*

*I. But if he's not kin but nevertheless he is a good person will you send him away anyway?*

*R Ah! If he's not kin but is someone good... ah ... we prefer a kinsman for son-in-law*

The teenage girls themselves often had more romantic ideas which did not necessarily involve kin but there was no evidence that they were actually rejecting suitors in favour of waiting for something better.

*(unmarried teenage girl) For me, these days there's no longer kin and not kin for marriage, if you see someone and you love each other you can marry.*

Despite the general attitude towards kin marriage in the village there was evidence of some change amongst the older generations when faced with their children's choices, but this woman was unusual.

*(woman, age 37) I will let them choose themselves because these days you can no longer force your children to marry someone they don't want. You have to let them choose who they love.*

There is a general assumption that marriages are potentially full of conflict despite being the central institution for the continuity of social life and a critical social building block. Thus everyone must do all they can to minimise conflict and marital break-down – and one of the best ways of doing this is through kin marriage.

### **Women's labour:**

Aside from reproduction women's labour was a key motive in village marriage. Men frequently mentioned labour, wanting wives to work in the home and the fields and to help their own aging mothers who are seen to have earned a rest.

*(man, age 40) A wife is very useful because she looks after the house. When there is no woman in the house it is badly kept. I work and bring things into the house but the rest of the work is the woman's. [he then describes all the domestic tasks : cooking, bringing water, etc.]*

*(man, age 27) [a woman's usefulness is] when she comes to the house, works for you, works for your mother, your father. Works also for all your other close kin.*

Here the need for good relationships between the wife and her family-in-law (especially the mother) appears and this is a further motivation to marry within the kin group:

*(man, age 32, unmarried) ...my first wife, wherever she comes from, if she loves me she is going to work for my parents.*

Men of all generations emphasized that their main goal in getting married early was to reproduce quickly in order to be sure of support and labour during old age.

*(man, age 48) here it's an advantage to marry early. Have a child early it's like an insurance. If you get old he will help you, whereas if you marry late, when you are old your children won't be able to do anything for you because they'll be very young.*

In the village both men and women viewed polygamy in a positive light. Part of this emerged from happy childhood experiences with many half-siblings but more important was labour; married women welcomed a co-wife because of the additional adult labour which would allow both women time off from cooking and housework to go on visits or just to rest. Nevertheless women wanted to be the first rather than a subsequent wife.

*(woman) Having a co-wife allows you to rest. If you do the cooking today, tomorrow it's her turn. If you go seeking money today, tomorrow she will seek..... if you travel you leave her in charge of your family, and on your return you find your family.*

*(woman) It's truly useful to have a co-wife with all the daily work we have to do daily. Sincerely, I really want one, if only for my health.*

Men too welcomed the idea of polygamy to give the first wife a rest – both from labour and childbearing and also to gain more freedom for themselves to travel.

*(man, age 40) At heart I wanted someone to help my first wife. Sometimes the house is empty, she stayed here alone during my frequent travels. With a second wife she wouldn't be alone. they could work together and help me. When they are both at home I could leave the village to go and find work to maintain my family. It's for all these reasons that I decided to find a second wife. If God gives me the means to have another young girl I'll take another wife.*

Men of all ages justified polygamy in terms of both labour and reproduction and the main factor inhibiting more polygamy was a lack of resources.

*(man, age 32) I think polygamy is good. I want to be polygamous because not only do I want lots of children but also, with just one wife, when she's ill the household is blocked.*

### **Residence:**

Village marriage occurred over several stages with different exchanges of gifts and payments of bridewealth. Once the religious benediction was made the couple was married and the woman could move directly to her husband's home but often she remained with her parents for several months. This was usually justified in terms of her labour, but was also one of the rare life-time occasions where the woman had some power and control, since every time her husband came to visit he was obliged to bring gifts and food for her family. From the perspective of the bride's family it was advantageous to extend this period, as observed by several men. Sexual contact between spouses was permitted during this time and occasionally a child was born before she moved to her husband's home. The day the bride moves to her husband's house, the expenses are supposed to be entirely paid. Both men and women agreed that the bride's situation in both her family of origin and her marital household would determine how quickly she would move after the marriage ceremony.

*(young woman) If your husband comes from a large family and there are otehr women working for your mother-in-law, you can stay at home and continue to help your mother with the housework. All depends on the situation in your husband's family. If his mother is alone he will bring you to the marital home as quickly as possible, if not he won't hurry because it's not urgent.*

A girl's ability to marry and move out was largely contingent upon her position in her natal family and whether her brothers had married and brought in wives. In her marital household there was less pressure on her to arrive quickly if there were other daughters-in-law or unmarried daughters. An oldest son with no sisters would be much less likely to postpone marriage than a younger son with married brothers and unmarried sisters. Girls whose brothers postponed marriage often were unable to marry themselves.

In contrast with urban areas, in the village there was no debate about where the newly wed couple would ultimately live – residence was always patrilocal. Men build their own house in their parents' compound and the idea is clearly expressed by men that their wife lives with them to help their parents

*(man, age 27) I will build a bedroom in my uncle's courtyard. My wife and I will stay there and so she can look after them and I will support them.*

This certainty resembled the absence of debate about residence of co-wives – they were always expected to live together in the man’s family compound, although each would have her own room.

### **Marriage Costs:**

There was a general consensus amongst older interviewees that, in the past the gifts and bridewealth which formed part of the marriage process were never an obstacle to marriage. The majority of villagers believed that nowadays many younger adults cannot find spouses, largely because of greed on the part of young women’s mothers who ask for ridiculously high bridewealth payments. In fact no interviewees, whether male or female, admitted to being personally involved in these exorbitant transactions, suggesting that the barriers may be more imagined than real. This perception of high costs has nevertheless contributed to a reluctance on the part of men to start negotiating a marriage because they fear that demands will be excessive and that their resources are inadequate. Men also observed that their new autonomy with respect to paying for their own marriages had repercussions for other traditional marriage-related behaviour such as norms whereby men could only marry once their older brothers have married.

*(man, age 48) The sum depends on who is looking for a wife and where he is looking for her..... If you don’t have any money, you’ll get nothing. But if you’re luckier than your older brother you marry..... parental authority has really gone down.*

Along the same lines, a man should not take another wife if he has unmarried sons of marriageable age. However some older men chose to marry again instead of supporting their sons and because of the financial obstacles to both young men and their fathers going through the whole marriage process simultaneously, this contributed to further delay in first marriage and increased young men’s motivation to go on labour migration:

When young men do continue to respect the birth order tradition, and given that a young woman does not want to leave home to marry until her brothers have brought wives into the household, we observe that as age at marriage increases for men this has knock-on effects for their younger siblings. Thus marriage costs in the village clearly contribute to delayed male age at marriage even if the actual barrier is more perceived than real. Both the increased integration into the wider economy and rural urban migration add to this inflation, but they are also the only real ways of resolving it, given that the local rural economy is seriously limited in its potential to generate wealth. Women cannot initiate marriage proceedings themselves and thus, if men delay their advances because they fear the costs, inevitably female age at marriage will rise.

The frequent temporary out-migration of young men to urban areas, partly in order to obtain resources for marriage both delays their initiation of the marriage process but also undermines an important incentive for marriage – that of acquiring a sexual partner - since non-marital sexual relationships are much easier to initiate in towns.

### **Village summary:**

In the village marriage was perceived as an essential and inevitable stage in everyone’s life; the precursor to reproduction and part of the development of full personhood. Women expected to contribute substantial amounts of labour to their in-laws (as they had to their parents), to be in a marriage where they were relatively



economically secure and that marriage would be the opportunity for reproduction. There was little expression of expectation of companionship and communication from a marital relationship. Men's expectations paralleled the women's; labour, legitimate sexual relationships, childbearing and respect. Because adult female labour was in demand, there were substantial similarities between the attitudes to co-wives and in-laws both in terms of labour and residence; in contrast both of these relationships caused substantial conflict and tension in the urban areas.

Recent nuptiality changes are relatively minor although there is certainly an increase in the numbers of unmarried girls 'of marriageable age'. This is less clear cut for men; older men believe that men are marrying younger these days because of increased financial autonomy and thus power to decide when and who to marry. In contrast, young men are preoccupied by the high costs of marriage and their inability to marry when they want. Women also think that men's age at marriage has risen. Pre-marital births were not cited as a problem but given that substantial numbers of young women had migrated to the cities to work as maids, and many young men were working in the docks on the coast, it may well be that those who were innovating more with both sexual and marital behaviour were not observed.

### ***Diversity in the small town***

In the small town, migration had had a substantial impact on marriage both at the individual and community levels. A substantial proportion of young and middle aged men had migrated to Italy to work in factories or the informal sector. This migration was both temporary but long term with the migrants visiting home every 2 years or so. Italian migrants offer very substantial sums of money as gifts, as bridewealth and to pay for festivities leaving non-migrant men unable to compete, with anticipated costs of marriage a major barrier to marriage leading to a deficit of males on the market. The Italian migrants contribute to increasingly conservative marital behaviour through choosing younger, virgin wives, and their financial ability to embark upon polygamy at young age. Ironically this conservativeness does not necessarily lead to high fertility because of the substantial periods of spousal separation.

Pre-marital sexual activity was clearly widespread in the small town with several cases of pre-marital births amongst the interviewees. Alongside this is an active discourse on the merits of virginity at marriage with descriptions of the marriage night virginity test which were totally absent from village discourse: this may have been because it was not broached by the researcher or because absence of virginity on the marriage night was not perceived to be an issue.

### **Choice of spouse:**

Although kin marriages continue to occur in the small town, a far higher proportion were between non kin, and relatives had a reduced role in both determining spouse choice and initiation of marriage. It was clear that there was substantial diversity in the motivations for choosing particular spouses. Women with extra-marital pregnancies often, but not always married the father – such pregnancies generally obviated the need for anything but the minimal bridewealth. However many parents opposed inter-caste marriages even in the case of pregnancy. Some women really did want to marry the Italian migrants but most indicated that although they required a

minimum of economic security the excessive wealth of the migrants was not necessarily something to pursue

*I What type of husband would you like?*

*R A husband with good morals, whether he is an emigré or not is not important. the essential thing is that he is able to take care of me properly. If he doesn't have the resources to do that I'll be more worried than happy. He must have a good social situation.*

*I Who would you rather marry, a resident or an emigré?*

*R (laughs) I don't mind. I'll marry the man my parents suggest, whether he's an emigré or not I don't really care because I can look after my own needs through my small commerce and even if I marry I will continue my work. If girls have a preference for emigrés it's because they want to be sheltered from need.*

This (non-emigré) man is clearly aware of wealth differentials but they are not paramount, although in another case a young man was not able to marry the mother of his child because her family hoped to attract a migrant.

*(man, age 30) ...our relationship had been going on a long time, we had been going out for years and the best thing was to make it all legal before it was too late. Also it was the case that I wasn't the only one to want this woman. there was also an emigré who wanted to marry her. He smothered her in presents but unluckily for him the girl had no desire to marry him because she was already linked to me.*

There was much more mention of love and choice amongst women compared to the village and there was a general ambivalence about marriages with kin in the small town. Such marriages were seen as being safe because kin are more able to tolerate problems and the woman has more support but if the marriage went irrevocably wrong a divorce between married kin had much more serious repercussions than divorce between non-kin.

*(woman) There is hidden pleasure. Kinship is a source of pleasure and it dilutes conflict and all bitterness. If one is related one can tolerate lots of things because of the kinship.*

Some men perceived that kin marriage is more important for woman than men. There were also echoes of health education campaigns which have clearly emphasised that children of closely related parents may suffer both physical and mental health problems. It was not clear whether this new knowledge had an impact on behaviour or was just an idea that people reiterated. The issue was never mentioned in the village. For many men the lure of a kinswoman may be largely related to lower marriage costs (observed in many cases in all sites):

*(man, age 36)... Before looking elsewhere it's best to look first in your family. My wife is my sister and my cousin. If it took me a while to marry her it was because I had few means. Aware of my difficulties my uncle sealed the marriage.*

However, like in the village it is also important for men to have a wife who will get along well with her family in law:

*I don't want to have a wife who doesn't like my parents. She must learn to love them and respect them because everything that I have, tomorrow will be theirs. My wife must know this and respect them for it.*

With respect to spouse choice there are three main groups of men; first the conservative rich Italian migrants who seek young virgin brides amongst their kin and whose relatives are very involved in the whole process: secondly, the wealthier non-migrants who are often better educated and who seek a free choice of wife outside the

kin group and often have pre-marital sexual relationships. The third group are the poor men who need their kin to enable them to marry – although premarital pregnancy may also reduce the costs of marriage significantly.

Simultaneously with the increase in conservative ‘traditional’ migrant marriages, non-traditional behaviour such as premarital pregnancies was also becoming more frequent in the small town demonstrating the increasing separation between marriage and reproduction. Although undesirable, these pregnancies were not an intractable social stigma, might lead to marriage with the father and did not preclude marriage with someone else. The major break with tradition occurring in the small town was the increasing proportion of marriages with non-kin, where the couple themselves chose their partners. Clearly there were more opportunities for young people to meet non-related partners, through school, through the workplace and generally because there was a larger population. Several strains were observed where the older generation was struggling to hold on to past values, increasingly challenged by the young. One value was pre-marital virginity, another was the taboo on marriage across the different castes. The population (whether old or young) was divided on whether this was acceptable and love and choice should predominate, or whether such cross-caste marriages were a step too far.

### **Labour:**

In the small town labour was barely mentioned by women in relation to marriage although the daughter-in-law expected to help her parents-in-law. The impression was that the labour required was not physically demanding and exhausting as in the village. Most people no longer farmed and there were labour saving devices available – taps, grinding mills and more commercially prepared foods. Men however were still concerned that their wife should help their mother.

*(man, age 20) She's my wife but it's equally important that she helps my mother who is now nearly 50 and continues to do the cooking and everything. We must find wives to look after her, she's too worn-out now. At the moment my older sister helps a bit, but she is married and she has to look after her husband and her child.*

Polygamy too was generally not discussed in terms of providing labour to help the first wife, although permitting the first wife to stop childbearing, or to use contraception was addressed by a few men. For the Italian migrants polygamy was very different: a form of conspicuous consumption, with migrants entering into polygamous marriages much younger than non-migrants. Here polygamy was a way of investing the wealth obtained abroad. There was no sense that it was either related to labour or to reproduction since the major brake on reproduction was the man's absence.

### **Costs of marriage:**

Although in all three sites everyone bemoaned the costs of marriage, these costs were genuinely highest in this small-town site. Some women and their families clearly held out for an “Italian migrant” to marry because of the economic benefits and because of the prestige of a wedding which demonstrated the wealth of the groom. Fear of costs may have inhibited some men from initiating marriage process, but they certainly encouraged young women to marry.

*(woman) Hey, it's because of this bridewealth that they marry. These days in our suburb, you only see bridewealth of over a million [CFA = £1000] There was a really young girl who got married here. She was given a bridewelaht of a million*

*with a basket of cola. She went to her marital household in S. That's why all her girlfriends now want to get married. I often tell them that you shouldn't get married like that, you've no idea what you might end up with.*

Several cost related issues were raised by men all of whom perceive that the bridewealth demanded and the costs of marriage have increased partly because of the need to demonstrate conspicuous consumption. Everyone proclaims to despise this yet they all participate.

*(man, age 70) ..... because people no longer marry for love, but money. Look what's happening here in K. Here when a person decides to marry it's more to demonstrate his wealth than anything else. Here the young are capable of spending fortunes just to show the neighbours that they can do what the others do. When we were young such things never happened. You took your wife from within the family and no-one hesitated to work hard for their in-laws.*

Men also consider that this phenomenon is also caused by mothers who want their daughters to marry rich men – which might be considered understandable given the limited occasions when women have any leverage or agency.

Some men denigrated these large bridewealths observing that they might subsequently limit a woman's power in her marital household. Migrants' wives certainly did have little autonomy in their marital homes but it is unclear that this is a consequence of the bridewealth, or more to do with the whole culture around migration and the characteristics of migrants.

In all three sites marriage to kin usually reduces the bridewealth – which is set by the girl's parents. Interestingly, when men talk about high bridewealth they blame the mothers of the brides but when they are mention that the sums were minimal they talk in general about her 'kin' or even her father.

*(man, age 35) We knew each other for a long time because we are related. She was bespoken for me since our childhood and my mother started to reproach me because I was still single, she told me to hurry up if I didn't want to lose her. The day when I really decided to marry her, I did it. I was lucky because her parents asked for nothing. they knew I wasn't rich. All they asked was that I would look after her and I think I've done my best.*

*It's the women who create all that. How can you give your daughter in marriage to someone she doesn't know, that she's never seen? They are no longer looking for their daughters' happiness. They're just looking to make money. A guy who comes from Italy, he comes with his money, he gives lots of money to marry the girl, but he's not an idiot because he knows that if he stays here nothing will remain so he goes off again.*

For non-migrant men in the small town polygamy remained a desirable objective constrained by the availability of resources,

*(man, age 44)... there's no particular reason [that I decided to be polygamous], and no one made me get other wives..... You know, a married man doesn't think too much about it when he looks for another wife..... we are Muslims and Islam authorises us to have up to 4 wives if we have the resources to maintain them all.*

whereas women's attitudes to polygamy were generally much less positive than in the village because the benefits had disappeared.

*I thank the Lord and my parents for having helped me to avoid a co-wife. When my husband had the resources he wanted to take another wife. He spoke to his mother who warned him that she would cut the link between them for ever.*

### **Residence:**

Patrilocal residence remained common – especially amongst the Italian migrants who frequently used their wealth to construct luxury modern villas for their parents in which they would install their first wife, and subsequent wives on later visits. These women were not with their in-laws to provide labour, but more because this was the traditional residential pattern, in addition the wives are strictly controlled during the husband's long absences. Thus the same residential pattern remains but with a very different meaning.

Women who were not married to Italian migrants and did not live in luxury villas also lived with their in laws – but not always. Again we observe the beginnings of a transition away from the village where no-one ever questioned the merits or the idea of patrilocality. In the small town it is recognised that the relationship is full of conflict and strain.

*I How would you describe the life of a newly married woman with her in-laws?*

*R It's a hard trial because the newly married woman has to behave properly in the heart of her in-laws family. She should treat her parents-in-law like her own parents. That's to say she must obey them. In fact men get married so that their wives can look after their parents.*

*I Do young women always like living with their in-laws?*

*R Nowadays very few young girls accept to go and live with their in-laws. They prefer to live alone with their husbands.*

*My daughters went to live with their in-laws. And if they come running to me with their troubles I always give them advice whilst always telling them never to leave their in-laws home.*

Amongst non-migrants polygamy remained frequent. However unlike the village where polygamous wives inevitably co-habited in the family compound, in the small town there were several cases where co-wives lived in different establishments or even different towns

### **Summary for the small town:**

There is evidence of change in various marital domains but not everyone is participating and part of the change is a conflict of values between generations. Motivations for marriage did not differ from the village (reproduction, helping the mother-in-law) but were expressed in different ways and with less systematic mention of women's labour. There is a strong perception that women are now marrying later with the exception of the young, virgin, Italian migrants' wives, but less delay is commented on for men. What is really at stake is the amount of money that men need (or feel they need) to mobilize with implications for the characteristics of the prospective wife (kin or not) and on the involvement of men's family (whether they need financial and negotiation support or not). In that sense the marital process differs from the village where discourses were much more homogeneous regarding these issues. As with first marriage, becoming polygamous is a question of having the means to do so and thus is more an issue of social prestige than a practical need for additional women; consequently, cowives do not systematically cohabit and there are thus less references of mutual help between them.

All respondents observe an increase in marriage costs mainly due to the competition imposed by “Italian” migrants. This situation has important implications for both the timing of first marriage and the choice of the spouse but the barriers to marriage are contributing to the development of pre-marital relationships although the larger and more diverse social environment is important. Cross caste marriage was inconceivable in the village whereas it was frequently mentioned, and usually condemned, in the small town. The greater anonymity, the increased possibilities for young people to meet through school and other venues, and presumably also more opportunities for pre-marital sex are all contributing to changing behaviour and values.

### ***Dakar: towards new types of union?***

As was expected, social heterogeneity was much more marked in Dakar, limiting the potential for generalisations. Many of the observations below need a degree of qualification. The key issue in Dakar is that at all levels of society in 1999 there had been a prolonged economic crisis for many years, leading to high levels of un- and underemployment and substantial insecurity for many people. A good education no longer guaranteed a job and housing was both in short supply and expensive. Uncertainty permeates most of the interviews. The economic uncertainty is coupled with much greater demands for expenditure in a city where communications are good, most people are exposed to a range of media, consumer goods are widespread, most children attend school and there is good (largely private) health care provision with high health expectations. This background permeates family and reproductive decision making with men wary of the costs of maintaining a wife and children; rent, clothing, health care and schooling.

### **Premarital sexual activity:**

The interviews indicate that many unmarried adults in Dakar are sexually active. This has implications for nuptiality and vice versa. In the past when premarital sexual activity was largely prohibited for girls there was pressure on men to marry for legitimate sexual relations. In Dakar such constraints have clearly disappeared and undermined one motivation for marriage. Premarital births are frequent and may precipitate marriage in diverse ways: with the father or, because of shame, marriage with anyone the family could find to take the girl. In either case financial barriers to marriage were lifted, but frequently the couple’s expectations of both love and economic well-being were seriously compromised.

*I can you tell me about this child you had, was it you who wanted it?*

*R No, I didn’t want it because I would have preferred if he had married me before having this child.*

*I What happened? Didn’t you take precautions?*

*R No, no. At the time I didn’t even think of precautions because I knew nothing about that. When he took me I was a child, I knew nothing.*

In many of the problematic marriages encountered in the interviews there had been a pre-marital pregnancy, although the father was not always the husband.

Interestingly several men associated uncontrolled sexual activity with unemployment – but these were often moral judgements on the general problems of modern youth perceived to lack both sexual control and the skills (and contacts perhaps) to get a job.

*I                      What are the causes of pre-marital pregnancies? How can they be explained?*

*R (man, 37)        There are multiple causes...because there is a lack of information, young people lack occupations, the problem of the negative influence of the media, of the environment as well.*

Among the men who perceive such relationships and pregnancies negatively, several refer to religion: for some the fear of long lasting premarital relationships leading to a pregnancy hastened their decision to marry their partner:

*It was not a question of marrying young but the circumstances were such that we decided to get married. Because we had been together for a long time and for religious reasons we didn't want to do something which was forbidden by our Muslim religion. We said to ourselves, we must marry, we are adult and to avoid some things which might seem like errors, notably having children outside marriage, especially since we were already parents, that was the basic problem.*

### **Choice of spouse:**

There is a striking ambivalence towards marriage in both men and women's discourses generated by the perceived necessity of combining economic security in marriage with the new obligation of free choice of an (unrelated ) spouse. Women's discourse is permeated by "love" (largely absent from men's interviews) and for the majority of women who had a choice (and some didn't) wealth alone was inadequate

*I                      You didn't love him?*

*R                      He had a good job. He had money – really. he had everything but I didn't love him.*

Simultaneously, women were very concerned about the potential of the man to provide support – to the extent that they would reject someone with poor prospects, sometimes abandoning love if the economic side were inadequate:

*I talked with him, and I made him understand that we could not marry now because 'you love me and I love you too, but you don't have the means to marry me.' me I have lots of needs.*

There were several cases where married women were very bitter because either they had been misled about their husband's economic situation, or their family had imposed a marriage which turned out to be an economic disaster

*Yes, I had two boys before marrying. Really I can't talk about it because all this misery I am living through was because of those two 'accidents'. that's why, for fear of continuing to have children here and there I married as a second wife, without thinking about it. My husband has nothing.*

Most men mention their economic situation as a reason to marry or to delay their marriage:

*(man, age 44)... If I had the means I would have married very young. In today's world the role models are those who are rich. If you're not rich you're almost a savage. I got married rather late because I didn't have the means.*

*(man, age 31) In Senegal there are so many couples who get married with no income, who have children without thinking. But they'll pay for it. there are lots of kids hanging around the streets. That's why..... if I had no income I wouldn't marry. That's my opinion – first it would be doing myself a mis-service, then I'd be rendering a mis-service to society.*

In both the village and small town, kin played a key role in spousal choice but in Dakar the role of kin is much more diverse; some men choosing to ignore their kin because they feel that the financial responsibilities of marriage are their own.

*I Did your kin influence you?*

*R (age 42) In the choice.....?*

*I Yes in the choice*

*R Not at all. From time to time they called me... I delayed finding a wife because I was 34. And it's not normal to remain unmarried up until that age. But as I didn't want to marry on a flight of fancy.... I wanted a good foundation.... financial plan sorted out, given the age at which one leaves university and the time to find a first job..... it's not easy.*

Whereas others recognised that there was more decision making power these days amongst the young who wanted to marry.

Amongst the poorer and less well educated (also some single mothers) several interviewees had been manoeuvred into marriages by their family – although not necessarily with kin. Such marriages could lack both love and economic security.

*I thought of all that but as I was an unmarried mother they told themselves that, instead of leaving her like that, if someone wanted her for their wife, even if she doesn't like him, and that's why they gave me in marriage. And all because I was an unmarried mother, so that I didn't commit another mistake, that's why they forced me into that marriage.*

Where a family was opposed to a specific marriage, a pre-marital pregnancy could overcome the opposition but in most cases the pre-marital pregnancies were presented as unplanned – but the will of God. Both men and women overcame familial opposition this way

*I was pregnant and I'd stopped going to school. My friend, who is now my husband is a Muslim. We had a first child. My parents refused to let us marry and so we had a second child. The parents realised that there was no point in insisting. When I had my second daughter, Papa was already dead. Maman didn't want me to remain an unmarried mother so my husband gave only 100,000 francs [£100] for the marriage and the baptism and we celebrated them both at the same time.*

*I How did your mother react?*

*R She was really angry, it was me who suggested to my mother that I marry the girl. At first my mother told me to wait a while, to prepare myself but when I forced her hand (through the birth of the child) we got married.*

Despite a greater tolerance of premarital relationships, illegitimate children remain stigmatised by certain categories of people: some of the older generation, the poor and the least educated, regardless of age. Therefore, premarital pregnancy may still accelerate marriage.

In Dakar kin marriage is no longer seen as necessary or even particularly desirable although it still occurs.

### **Labour:**

In Dakar female labour was barely mentioned although some care was evidently expected where women lived patrilocally. More important was the role of the wife as someone who could contribute to the new household's income and as the critical person in caring for and bringing up the children. This reflects the new values in



Dakar where households have become more nuclear and parents are accorded much more individual responsibility for the upbringing and therefore subsequent moral behaviour of their children (Randall and LeGrand 2003). Whereas some men expected that their (well educated) wives would continue to work after marriage to bring in an adequate income, there were others who did not want their wives to work and be economically independent even in cases where they themselves had shown themselves to be totally inadequate at bringing in money.

### **Residence:**

Post-marital residence was an area ridden with conflict for many women. Well-educated women who valued their personal independence, a consequence of their employment, independent premarital accommodation, their own taste and material possessions, often expressed their desire to raise their children away from uncontrollable and undesirable influences and were usually very reluctant to live with their in-laws. For women the only justification could be the temporary economic benefits while saving for their own accommodation.

*At the moment I'm with my mother in law, with my sisters-in-law, my brothers-in-law and their children. We make up a large household and it's difficult to bring children up in these conditions. the ideal would be that we each have our own flat.*

*Yes, but you have to cook, to serve up, sometimes what you cook is good, sometimes it's less good, but you know.....mothers.....it's hard. But you're patient, knowing it will end one day, living with the parents-in-law. It's hard.*

*I            You don't think there's an advantage to living with your in-laws*  
*R            There is only one advantage – economic.*

In contrast, for men, where post-marital patrilocal residence was not an option, the problems of housing were a major disincentive to marriage. The economic benefits of patrilocal residence were very influential for men but generations of socialisation about the normative value of living with their family was also a major pressure:

*I            Why did you choose to bring your wife to live with your father?*  
*R (age 44)    I didn't choose, it was part of tradition – to live with your parents when you marry. And she, she also has her aunt next door. It's to my advantage because I don't pay any rent.*

*(man, age 38) Yes, in the family, one lives with lots of difficulties but generally you overcome them. they are the difficulties of living in a group but it's much easier to live in a community than to live outside it, that's to say separate.*

However some men refused to live with their parents' place, the issue being to avoid the constant involvement of the family in the couple's life, thus clearly demonstrating a break with the traditional values emphasised both in the past and in the other two study sites. Such attitudes were primarily expressed by the university educated, but also the well-off who had the ability to be residentially independent:

*I            Why didn't you stay with your parents ?*  
*R (age 39)    I preferred to come here...because our couple was made outside the family. there was the option of staying with them, of saving, perhaps of building our own house, but in reality I don't think you save much by staying with your family. that's one thing. Secondly I preferred to come here, as I often say. Sometimes, I*

*go..... when we have problems we sort them out between ourselves far from the family. It's nobody else's business.*

Housing and residence were key issues in Dakaroises' attitudes to polygamy. Most accepted that their husbands had signed up to the polygamy option available at marriage (confirmed by men) and although most women opposed their husbands taking a second wife, in general it was acceptable if the co-wife lived elsewhere. Since maintaining two households was impossible for most men, housing costs can be seen as a catalyst of nuptiality change. There were examples (told by women) of men who had attempted polygamy – frequently in the face of opposition both by the first wife and his family, sometimes even hidden polygamy. Usually the second marriage ended in divorce. Interestingly, such situations were echoed in men's interviews, although expressed more favourably to the man. Not all men pursued polygamy - one who had experienced poverty in childhood because of his father's polygyny said:

*Me I really can't see why people want to be polygamous. If one is monogamous with a small family you can save, because life is very difficult.*

### **Costs of marriage:**

In contrast to the other study sites the costs of the ceremony and bridewealth were seen to be negotiable and not exorbitant and there seemed to be less social pressure for high bridewealth. In Dakar bridewealth's traditional role as compensation for lost female labour could be considered an anachronism and many in Dakar stated that they had paid no bridewealth except for the symbolic minimum, although the marriage ceremony and party may be very expensive.

*(man, age 42) The bridewealth is symbolic, it must be symbolic..... Historically bridewealth was to compensate for the void created in the family when it lost a member, lost labour force... compensation to help the brothers who had to spend bridewealth elsewhere. So it was a compensation which had to retain its symbolic character and that's no longer the case..... it's become something else.*

According to some men a woman may feel uncomfortable amongst her peers if the bridewealth paid was small but no woman expressed this and several older women stated that they demanded no bridewealth for their daughters but had no power in the case of their sons' marriages. This suggests that for urban women of both generations bridewealth has lost its social importance.

In contrary to the other sites where financial constraints were mainly perceived to be related to bridewealth and other marriage expenses, in Dakar, men worry about their ability to support their coming family in the future. It was this fear of post-marital expenses – especially of the inevitable children that are the primary motive for marriage - that prevented men from marrying, not the costs of the event.

*Marriage is a heavy responsibility. You marry for life. So you have to think of the children and equally you must think about raising them in good conditions. Why do I say good conditions? because you need good housing, me that's my aim, before I marry I must be able to keep my wife and my children in good conditions..... That's why I'm in no hurry to marry.*

Pregnancy may precipitate marriage but not inevitably. This demonstrates the heterogeneous nature of the increase in out-of-wedlock births; some occur within a

relatively stable couple, some lead to the formation of a stable couple and marriage and others are unfortunate 'accidents' where the mother remains a single parent. Pregnancy-stimulated marriages were much less expensive in terms of both bridewealth and ceremony.

### **Barriers to marriage:**

A significant proportion of unmarried female respondents were in their late twenties or early thirties in contrast to the other communities where unmarried women were much younger. Without exception all wanted to marry but had not yet met a man who was prepared to commit himself. Despite the fact that most were well-educated and employed with regular salaries the lack of female agency observed in the village and small town is echoed here. Women still have to wait until a man offers for her, and the quasi disappearance of the role of the family in facilitating marriages in Dakar means that many women are left in a position of helplessness. Single women were clearly concerned about their situation, recognizing that their social status and what they saw as potential happiness and fulfilment was tightly related to their marital condition and to potential motherhood – for which marriage was seen to be essential.

There were many more accounts of failed marriages in Dakar – divorces, separations, inadequate husbands. This does not appear to be a consequence of greater agency amongst Dakar women but more a result of the difficulties of life, work and survival in the city. Where female respondents were separated or divorced it was almost invariably because the husband had failed economically – or had actually misled her about his economic position before marriage. Women did not mention infidelity as a problem yet most must have expected such behaviour since there are frequent complaints by unmarried women that the only boyfriends they can find are men who are already married.

*Ah! you see people who are just playing, some lie, others tell the truth. there are others who come and you are sure they really love you but it turns out they're married. I tell you what I know, all the blokes who have courted me were married men. And when they spoke of marriage I was afraid, and I said no, because given that I had never been married I'm not going to marry a bloke who has already got a wife.*

Most women should be aware that married men have frequent extra-marital relations but they do not seem to expect sexual fidelity – their concerns and complaints were more about economic security. This is echoed in the responses to potential polygamy – only one woman hinted that she disliked sharing her husband sexually with another woman – most were more concerned about sharing his income and accommodation.

If men are more autonomous regarding their marriage process, the question is less when and whom to marry than 'can I really do it now?' Peer pressure is strong and the notion of "time to get married" exists in Dakar and men will try to respond. It may be this pressure on younger men, who are more constrained than their elders were, which generates their frequent recourse to religion and the African culture in their discourse, to justify their need to get married

*I* Why at that moment (age 38) precisely did you decide to get married?

*R (age 47)* Because I had really gone past the age of marriage. I should have married earlier and then it happened.

*I*                      *What made you decide? Was it because you were working, or what motivated you to marry at that moment.*

*R*                      *No, I've always worked – it wasn't that. because simply all around me everyone was getting married and I saw it was the normal thing to do.*

*(man, age 36) And I said to myself, if the time is like that, if I wait until I have a job I risk being 40 before I get married. What's certain is that there will always be problems and one is obliged to overcome them. One is African, one is Senegalese, one has to be sociable. Better get married and be part of the flow than wait.*

### **Summary for Dakar:**

In general, everyone perceives a delay in first marriage for men and women largely as a consequence of economic constraints inhibiting men from initiating marriage, not through the costs of marriage but post-marital costs, especially of children. Kin are less involved in the marriage process, even if parental approval remains important, but accommodation crises mean that patrilocal residence remains frequent although it is increasingly rejected by women and men. For both men and women who remain unmarried beyond the normative “marriageable age” there is substantial social stress because legitimate reproduction remains a highly valued way of affirming, adult and Senegalese identity and therefore being fulfilled.

Dakar may be the key site to understanding the most profound values of Senegalese society, since it is where the conflicts become most evident because of the difficulties in maintaining traditionally valued behaviour. However because Dakar is the place where there is most education, most participation in the modern world economy, most consumerism, most media, it is also the site where new fault lines emerge and the conflict between old values and new aspirations is most obvious.

### **Discussion: Agency, continuity and change**

There are many occasions when Wolof women seem to be constrained by traditions, expectations and social conventions. Although there are individuals who challenge the system, the majority work within the parameters of socially delimited roles. In all three study sites the general expectation is that there is little space for women's initiative in marriage processes. In the village, where everyone accepts that women now have a power of veto over an unwanted marriage, there were several cases where kin ‘persuaded’ women to marry someone. Ironically, it was only in Dakar that two women talked about their ‘forced’ marriages – ironic because in Dakar there was far more evidence of female autonomy, initiative and decision making. It may be that whereas a village woman might represent her unwanted marriage as something she had been persuaded into, a Dakar woman might represent a similar situation as a ‘forced’ marriage to an educated interviewer, either because the Dakaroise was more aware of the (western) values of liberty and wanted to make her case strongly or just because the more liberal and cosmopolitan environment allowed them to express themselves in ways unthinkable in the village. Certainly in the village, young women had little agency over marriage save the veto and the parental generation is trying hard to retain its power over the girls even if they have lost it over their sons.

*You know once a girl is of marriageable age or a bit older she must get married. A woman can't get herself a husband. A woman can't just get up one day and say to a man, you're going to marry me. The final decision has to come from the man. It's he who, having seen and judged you, decides finally to marry you.*

*It's the case that one fine day a son may send a message to announce he's married. In contrast the girl cannot marry without her father's permission because no-one other than the father can give his daughter in marriage, as long as the father is alive. A girl can't give herself in marriage.*

In the village women only really achieve agency over marriage once they become mothers of marriageable girls. This is clearly recognised by young men who blame the mothers for demanding excessive brideprice and gifts at marriage.

The small town retains much of this inequality in gender roles with respect to marriage and the transfer of power between generations. Nevertheless through pre-marital sexual activity and births some young women have found ways to manipulate the system although any pregnancies are always represented as accidental - either through lack of knowledge or lack of foresight. Although young small town may thus have more agency vis-à-vis their parents, the social conventions mean that they are still at the mercy of the young man's initiative.

In Dakar the enormous social heterogeneity masked a huge diversity in women's agency. Poor, uneducated women were effectively in the same situation in the village, with their marriage being substantially controlled by their kin. Even for the well-educated it remained socially unacceptable for women to initiate marriage as evidenced by a spinster in her early thirties who was desperate for a husband but whose boyfriend is less keen.

*He didn't react. perhaps the problem of marriage preoccupies me more than him.*

Everywhere although the parents and other kin retain a substantial role in marriage – especially of their daughters – everyone admits that control over sons has largely disappeared.

*I And if your daughter refuses the marriage?*

*R I'll find a way of convincing her and I'll do everything to make her accept the marriage. You know the same thing happened to my sister. She put forward her daughter to marry a bloke but her daughter refused at first, but in the end we convinced her. Now she's with her husband.....*

*I And for the boys?*

*R No I wouldn't choose wives for my sons because they wouldn't accept that.*

Women's general perception is that they have to wait for a suitable man to appear – and therefore if the disadvantages of marriage are sufficient to discourage men, the women also fail to marry.

*I say to myself that a man, in general, you can't hold him and say – 'you must marry me'. there are some who do that and win but there are others who do it and make the men flee – no problem.....up until now I have never met a woman who decided to marry a man (laughs) and, that could happen but me, I've never seen it, I've no yet seen it.*

Dakar women are prepared to take certain actions to try and force the hand of their potential spouses. In this case the young woman's cousin wanted to marry her as his second wife and she used the situation to precipitate a marriage with her long-term boyfriend whose economic situation was precarious.

*They asked me if my friend was going to marry me, given that I had refused the other one, and if that wasn't the case they weren't going to leave me there – not at my age. So I got irritated and I went to my sister's and, to frighten my boyfriend so that he'd marry me, I told him that I was going to accept the bloke who wanted to marry me. At that moment he went to speak to his parents and afterwards they came to see mine.*

### **Nuancing men's agency**

Men's apparent greater agency over marriage is not, however, without constraints. Many village men are still subject to substantial familial and societal control both in spousal choice and residence – particularly where the resources for marriage must be provided by the father. This is where changes are to be expected because of migration and independent economic activity. However it should be recognised that our data are biased towards both the men and women who are the most conservative and the least influenced by migration because in the village we were largely obliged to interview those who had not migrated<sup>2</sup>.

In the small town, men's main constraint is the lack of money: the wealthy can largely do what they want although their behaviour is seen to depend also on their level of schooling. Italian migrants are seen as rather "stupid" with no education or knowledge of traditional work:

*I*        *Would you spend a sum like that for your marriage ?*

*R*        *never – I could behave like them because I don't have the same education as them. Most of those who go to Italy haven't been to school, and they have no experience of real life. All that they can do before they leave is petty trade in the weekly markets.*

If more educated men who manage to have enough financial means are much freer in their choices, poor men remain dependent on kin whom they need for both financial support and help as negotiators with the woman's family. It is likely that over the next few years we will observe a similar phenomenon here as in Dakar, with an extended premarital period with frequent premarital sexual relationships.

In Dakar men's actions are determined mostly by a mix of peer influence, money and a general feeling of following the social and cultural norms which value marriage. Family is less directly important in men's marital decision making than in the small town but is not absent. The social and cultural norms they refer to probably include a considerable amount of indirect pressure from the family.

### **Pathways to change**

It is impossible to disentangle all the complexity of cause and effect but it is certainly possible to consider some of the key pathways to change and how these are experienced in different environments and different by men and women. Take for example both polygamy and patrilocal post-marital residence: for men both of these are seen as largely desirable forms of behaviour in all three study sites and therefore in a wide range of socio-economic situations. In contrast, for women, although both marital behaviours are more or less desirable in the village<sup>3</sup>, in the small town many are challenging their desirability and by the time we reach Dakar the majority (although not everyone) of women are strongly opposed to both, whilst accepting that there are particular situations which would render either somewhat more acceptable (separate residence for polygamy, the economic benefits of patri-local residence). It

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<sup>2</sup> There were so few young unmarried men present that our male interviewer identified two young men who should have been interviewed in the village and traced them to a port and interviewed them there.

<sup>3</sup> It is at times hard to disentangle whether women genuinely desire such a situation in the village or have just never been exposed to the possibility that such a situation is not the norm and therefore are unable to conceive of and express their opposition to it.

is then incumbent upon us to consider what has changed for women that has not for men. Here the critical factor is labour, alongside a romantic individualism imbued by the media coupled with schooling. In the village the shortage of female labour and the unremitting daily grind of heavy work plus regular childbearing mean that anything that can alleviate this or compensate for it is acceptable – and has thus been internalised by men and women as the correct way to proceed and even with a sort of moral identity – this is what Senegalese do. A changing economic base, schooling, media do not alter these benefits for men because there are advantages other than labour for them – more sexual partners, more children, a sense of contributing to the family. But for women, once the labour advantage is eroded, the new values generated by urban life – those of individualism, romanticism, the nucleation of the family, personal responsibility for the upbringing and thus quality of the child, all combine to undermine any advantage of these traditional marriage behaviours.

The main marital change that we have investigated in Senegal is the increase in age at first marriage for both men and women. This has occurred alongside a second level of marital changes - a range of other marital behaviours which concern relationships between different people; polygamy, the relationship between spouses, the relationships between in-laws. The transformation of these relationships is related to changing age at marriage in numerous different ways: as the stimulator, as the consequence, or just co-variation stimulated by the same external profound social and economic changes which Senegalese people have been experiencing over two or three decades. A third level of transformation in marital behaviour concerns more 'practical' changes: costs of marriage, residence, and the role of female labour. All of these are both a part of and consequences of this social change (stimulated by globalisation and 'development') that is independently influencing each outcome but these practical changes are also part of numerous interactions and feedback loops.

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