Separated from their parents: consequences for child wellbeing in modern Senegal

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1. Introduction

In much of West Africa the child is seen as first and foremost belonging to the community and then to its biological parents. In Senegal child upbringing has been traditionally represented as a responsibility for all members of the group, although urbanisation, more investment required for children in terms of schooling and material goods and changing residential patterns this may be changing. The general West African perspective that children growing up away from their parents is both normal and acceptable differs from that adopted by international child welfare organisations who tend to see parent-child separations as problematic. For example the Committee on the Rights of the Child discussion report states (para 649):

> *...the Committee wants to emphasize that all necessary measures should be taken to prevent the separation of the child from his/her family of origin. In that regard the Committee refers to the previous paragraphs on the importance of the family environment and the need to provide parents with the support they need in the performance of their parental responsibilities.*
> *Committee on the Rights of the Child Fortieth session, 2005*

Earlier the document does specifically recognise diverse 'family' forms, including extended families and the rights of grandparents, but nevertheless there is a heavy emphasis on the benefits of co-residence of parents and their biological children.

If this document can be seen as a guiding principle then the substantial numbers of children brought up away from their parents in West Africa could be perceived as undesirable. In this paper we use qualitative data from Senegal to examine two frequently encountered situations where children are separated from one or both of their parents - fostering and international labour migration - in order to investigate whether such perceptions have permeated through to small town Senegal. We examine the ways in which both those affected by parent-child separation and the wider population talk about the issues involved and the extent to which there are diverse representations of the phenomenon. A particular focus is whether the motives for parent-child separation influence how it is represented: are kinship solidarity or economic motives seen as equally valid justifications for parent-child separation in a modern world?

Although international policy documents denounce unnecessary parent-child separation, it is not really clear what dimensions are problematic and why: is it that parents are judged to be the best people to bring up their own children and those who are most likely to have those children's interests at heart? What dimensions of child well-being are parents expected to maximise, particularly in contexts of poverty where day to day contact with parents may be incompatible with economic well-being, spiritual well-being (needing to study the Koran), educational well-being (needing to go to school) etc. To what extent do the experience and outcomes differ by gender? Furthermore which parent is most important and why? In some of the fostering definitions reviewed by Pilon (2003

see below), children who were resident with their father but not their mother were considered fostered. This situation parallels that of children whose father has migrated to work in Europe. Do adults or more general wider society benefit from extensive child-parent separation whilst the children's experience of parent-child separation is much more ambivalent?

1.1 Fostering

Child fostering has long been highly prevalent in West Africa (Pilon 2003) bringing both benefits and disadvantages for the fostered children and their kin (Ba 2003, Bledsoe 1990, Bledsoe & Isiugo-Abanihe 1989, Castle 1995, Isiugo-Abanihe 1985). The potential mobility of children can lead to a disassociation of the costs of high fertility from those who bear children and can counter demographic imbalance (Vandermeersch 2002), and has mitigated domestic labour shortages and isolation for many elderly people. Fostered children can benefit from enhanced educational opportunities and the links created or reinforced by fostering consolidate networks of solidarity and reciprocation.

Recent economic studies of fostering in Burkina Faso (Akresh 2008a & b) which analysed the characteristics of households both fostering in and out, demonstrated a Pareto improvement in educational outcomes for fostered and non fostered children. Akresh believes his work generates evidence to challenge the policy context where most international development organisations believe fostering has negative consequences for a child's welfare outcomes. Serra's (2009) study of other economic dimensions of fostering in West Africa highlights contradictions in the demographic and anthropological literature between the rationales for fostering in and out. Demographers identify fostering as a way of sharing the costs of child-rearing amongst a wider group of relatives which she sees as incompatible with the anthropological understanding of benefits accruing to foster parents in terms of consolidating their access to a wider social network saying 'ultimately, if natural parents desire to pass onto other the costs of children, what kinds of benefits do the foster parents envisage for themselves?' (Serra 2009 p.158). We believe that this economic approach grounded in present economic realities misunderstands the nature of risk aversion behaviour in Africa which is not only about current resources and flows but about building credit and contacts for future support when, in a highly risky and unpredictable environment, people may be balanced differently economically. Vandermeersch takes a more sophisticated view of the demographic dimensions of the redistribution of children identifying both giving households (with too many children) and receiving households, or individuals within receiving households, (with too few children) being better off demographically after fostering has occurred.

1.1.2 Defining fostering

Different disciplinary backgrounds focus their fostering research on different age groups. Economists are more interested in children over the age of 6 who, in Africa, are both potentially economically useful and school age (seen as increasing human capital). In contrast demographers such as Vandermeersch may focus on younger children because of an interest in children as consumers and fostering as a response to demographic

imbalance. In both cases there will be transitions from one state to the other: young children become older and go to school and contribute to the household economy and older children may have first been fostered when they were much younger.

Pilon (2003) reviews a range of definitions used over two decades and demonstrates that researchers have taken many different interpretations of fostering both in terms of the ages involved and also whether fostering just involves living apart from the mother, or from both parents. Most approaches using survey data take a rather mechanistic perspective, using survey data (often DHS) and applying an algorithm (which includes age limits and living apart from one or both parents) to identify who is fostered and the scale of the phenomenon. Such analyses cannot really disentangle different categories of children living away from their parents to establish whether they are perceived to be in similar relationships, and whether they are, in fact, thought to be fostered at all. In contrast Castle (1995) investigates the details of fostering arrangements and identifies Fulani children in Mali who are locally understood to be fostered, but would often not emerge as such from an algorithm approach because they live in the same compound as their mother, although responsibility for the child has been given to another woman[1].

More intense qualitative work such as that by Ba (2003) on fostered children in Dakar provides a more nuanced approach to the diverse situations of children being brought up away from their parents – identifying longer and shorter term exchanges of children, temporary movement of children for schooling and koranic school, differences between urban and rural and cases where rights over and responsibilities for a child are definitively transferred to another person for life. In this last case the wolof word "*joxé*" (=given) is used. Under these circumstances when the child is given the parents may often add "*yax yi la la lath*" meaning 'All I ask from you is his bones' or *"ay yakham laa la lacc, yawmal xiyam*" 'I will only claim back his bones on judgement day'. Such (*joxé*) fostering occurs in two main circumstances: in the first case someone decides to give his or her child to a close relative because that person has no child. Such cases are primarily within the context of familial solidarity and considerations of relative wealth or poverty are largely irrelevant. However in other cases a child is fostered into a household seen to be as being better off than the natal household, primarily as a way of improving prospects for that child This total transfer of parental responsibility is very different from the child who lives with relatives so that he can attend school or the young girl sent to the city for domestic employment where parents have not delegated away all their parental responsibilities..

1.2 Other reasons for parent-child separation

West African children have always spent substantial proportions of their childhood separated from their biological parents, especially fathers, through fostering, other forms of child and adult mobility, divorce, polygamy and remarriage (Antoine & Dial 2005). In colonial times forced labour recruitment led to substantial male migration and subsequent taxation and monetarisation encouraged seasonal labour migration of farmers throughout the Sahel (Cordell et al 1996, Painter 1987, Swindell 1984). Since

[1] Whether such a fostered child is recorded as being in the same household as his/her mother depends on the definition of household used in the survey.

Independence, male seasonal migration and international migration have been highly prevalent in some regions of Senegal (Guilmoto 1997, 1998; Lambert 2002; Traore 2003; Zachariah 1981). In recent decades many west African women have migrated to cities to work mainly as domestic workers and in Senegal, most flows of rural migrants head for Dakar (Fall, 1998; Diop, 1989). These women often leave the village (or smaller towns) when they are very young and come back regularly for ceremonies or special occasions until they get married after which they usually return to the rural areas at least until their children are old enough to be left.

A new form of parent-child separation has developed over the last twenty five years with the increase in male migration to Europe. In parts of Senegal this is very pronounced with substantial proportions of adult men in Italy and Spain. Most men first migrate to Europe when young and unmarried. Although one of the main aims of migration is often to obtain the resources necessary for marriage, having achieved this state (or even multiple marriages) other imperative needs for resources mean that few men stop migrating after marriage: there are now many children and adolescents who have spent much of their childhood knowing their father only through telephone conversations or brief annual visits.

1.3 Aims

This paper examines the experiences and perceived consequences of these two different forms of growing up separated from one or both biological parents for various dimensions of childhood: general upbringing and the inculcation of moral values; schooling including both access to schooling and familial and financial support whilst at school; the acquisition of both social and practical skills, childhood happiness and general wellbeing. We take a gendered perspective, constantly aware of how these may differ for boys and girls and also how each gender talks about separation from parents. We examine how fostering and parental migration are talked about both by the individuals to whom is has happened, and by observers around them. Our aim is to examine whether the understanding of the impacts of parent-child separation differs according to the reasons for that separation and the extent to which people articulate economic motives for fostering. We hypothesise that, because a major role for married men in Senegal is provision of economic resources for both wives and offspring (Antoine and Dial 2005) and that because labour migration is associated with very substantial economic benefits, absent fathers are rarely criticised: the potential economic benefits far out-weighing any minor disadvantages generated by children growing up without a father's presence.

2. Data and methods

Our data are 84 in depth qualitative interviews undertaken with adult men and women of all ages in a small town in North-West Senegal in 2007. Previous qualitative research from 1999 which compared reproductive strategies in Dakar, the small town (T) and a village (LeGrand et al 2003, Randall and LeGrand 2003) had shown that migration to Italy was having a major impact on marriage dynamics in the small town. In 2007 a small, follow-up, qualitative research project investigated the impact of extensive migration to Europe on family dynamics more generally. Fieldwork was undertaken in

October and November 2007 by 4 post-graduate students (2 men and 2 women) trained in demography or sociology. After 4 days of intensive training and refinement of the interview guides the team moved to T where the first week was spent getting to know the town and the different neighbourhoods, talking to administrators and key personnel in the town and meeting the councillors and leaders of each neighbourhood. The next three weeks were spent undertaking in-depth interviews. In each of the 6 neighbourhoods 6 men and 6 women were interviewed by same sex interviewers, stratified by age and selected at random; two aged 18-29, two aged 30-49 and two aged 50+. All interviews were undertaken in Wolof and translated and transcribed in French by the interviewer immediately so that the researchers could read them and give rapid feedback on both the quality of the interview, and specific themes and topics. Every evening the team met to discuss problems they had encountered, interesting themes which had emerged and as a result of these discussions further questions or themes were added to the topics to be covered in the interviews. During the translation process there was much discussion in the team about the appropriate translation into French of key, difficult to translate terms.

Each of the 6 neighbourhoods in the town has a very different atmosphere and history and the neighbourhood based approach to interviewee identification generated a good cross-section of society in T. There is probably a slight bias towards those people who can be found at home during the day because in compounds where there were several people of the target sex and age, there was a tendency to select one who was present rather than absent. Thus we may have a slight underrepresentation of the working population. We have however obtained a much more heterogeneous sample than would have been obtained from a snowball approach. Further targeted interviews were undertaken with key informants and any migrants who were identified who were back in T for a visit.

The in-depth interviews took a life history approach with each respondent encouraged to talk about their personal experiences of growing up and then as adults. The interviews focused on their education, professional lives, family life in the past and present and their experience of marriage. Specific accounts were requested about migration decision making and the impact of migration of others on individuals, households and more generally in the town. All interviews were read at least twice and then entered into a N6 database where they were coded according to themes. Although an outline coding scheme had been developed beforehand according to the main hypotheses of the study, interviews were coded inductively according to emergent themes. It was at this stage that fostering emerged as a key issue. This meant that the interviewer guide did not have a specific question on fostering and the issue had not been flagged up with interviewers prior to the research: it emerged from the life histories.

3. Fostering in the small town

3.1 scale of fostering

Of 81 life history interviews 17 individuals spontaneously mentioned that they had spent time as children in a household away from their parents. Although all these cases would be ‘fostering’ as defined by the algorithms used in surveys (Pilon 2003), in reality there is

debate about whether they were truly fostered. (see 1.1.2 above) From our data, three types of situation might not be locally conceptualised as fostering: children living with relatives in town for part of the year to go to school; boys studying in koranic schools; some cases of very close kin fostering which was seen more as the obligation of close kin to contribute to child upbringing, than fostering.

I Are there any fostered children in your house?
R Yes, but they can really be seen as part of the house
I Are they kin? What is your kinship link?
R One of the fostered people is my sister-in-law's sister, the other is my niece. They are close kin. It's not real fostering, it's our close family. Woman **ASSS4**

Often in Senegal when a young woman moves to her husband's home on marriage, especially if her husband is polygamous, she asks a younger sister or cousin to go with her to help her with domestic work. This would qualify as fostering in the algorithm approach although some would not consider it as such. However there were cases where women who had lived with their older sister or their aunt definitely considered themselves as having been fostered. Hence there are issues about what constitutes fostering – and the same relationship may be seen differently according to whether it is observed from the child's or the adult's perspective. Given this ambiguity, we here follow other demographic research in using 'fostering' in this paper to refer to all accounts where children were raised for part of their childhood by people other than their parents, whilst recognising that this encompasses a range of different local meanings and transfer of rights and responsibilities.

The extent of reported fostering varied considerably by interviewer and by sex: 9/21 women interviewed by one assistant reported having been fostered compared to only 4/22 for the other female interviewer. Men mentioned being fostered much less (1/19 and 2 or 3/18 – one was unclear). Because our life history approach asked people to talk about what were important dimensions of their lives, in many cases we cannot be certain that fostering did not occur in boyhood – just that men did not feel the need to talk about it. In general male respondents were reluctant to talk about their childhood, saying that they were unable to see why this could be relevant to our work: men were more comfortable talking about their work and their adult life. Thus we can be sure that fostering was both frequent for women and an important part of their lives – for men we can only speculate about frequency but need to conclude that either they did not want to talk about it or it was unimportant.

When asked about whether households currently contained foster children and for what reasons, it was clear that there were many boys in T living away from their parents for a variety of reasons, the most prominent being death of a mother, formal education or Koranic school. The latter is a very particular form of living apart from parents (Ba 2003). Young boys may often live with their religious teacher for several years and this could be interpreted as fostering in that the master is responsible for the boys' welfare and often sends them out to beg alms and food. Although many men said that they had been to koranic school as children, few specified whether they had lived with their parents or with the teacher.

Thus it seems that both fostering itself and the way people talk about it is highly gendered. The few men who mentioned it spontaneously either referring to themselves or their sons often indicated that fostering was about schooling, apprenticeship and acquiring skills and this reflected the general male preoccupation with economic issues whereas women were much more concerned about how they were cared for, whether they were loved and treated equally and the extent to which they saw being fostered as inhibiting their schooling.

3.2 Girlhood experiences of fostering

A few girls were fostered as a result of maternal death, but many were fostered to keep a childless woman company or just because kin asked their parents for a child. Experiences varied enormously, ranging from those who were very bitter because they felt that the foster parent had not invested in their schooling or had not supported them adequately, or at least that being fostered had hindered success. However this was not universal and for others their representation of fostering was postitive having been well-treated by the foster mother having received a 'good upbringing'.

> *" Jam ak salaam " {I lived with my aunt in peace]. I did all the housework. I cooked, I was the only big girl at my aunt's and I helped her with everything. She brought me up well. She looked after me. She brought me up strictly in the same way that you would bring up your own child, someone who is dear to you. She always told me what was not good and what I shouldn't' do. She gave me advice all the time.* **Woman ASRV2**

It is however important to think about the Senegalese context when interpreting women's statements about good upbringing.. For most Senegalese women the most important thing in life is marriage. This woman, like many others considers that she has been well brought up by her aunt because the aunt trained her in all the domestic skills necessary for her future life as a wife and mother and thus prepared her well for the critical stage of marriage. All women who had been fostered as children had contributed significantly to domestic work (as they would have done in their natal household): cleaning, cooking and childcare and this was inevitably seen not as exploitation but a beneficial upbringing. Although respondents often started off by saying that they had been well brought up by their foster family, later in the interview dimensions of resentment emerge – often related to the fact that they hadn't attended school or hadn't been supported in their studies.

> *Also, when my big sister raised me, there are people who say that fostering is difficult, but me, I never had any problems with my big sister because I was fostered with her when she didn't have any children [she was married]. She brought me up like her own daughter. I never had any problems with her*

However this same woman states later in the interview

> *It was my big sister's work that destroyed both my schooling and my coranic school studies*

In her case she had been sent to live with her older sister and although she had started school her sister hurt her hand and ASSS2 had to stay at home and help with all the

domestic work. By the time her older sister's hand was better she had missed so much school that she couldn't go back.

Another ambivalent respondent was ASSS5 who, while grateful to her aunt for treating her well

> *My aunt prefers me to her own children. I have more power in this house than her children. She treats me in a way that means I don't even feel my mother's death. She does everything for me, she looks after me as she should*

makes it quite clear that this same loving aunt exploited her so much that she had to leave school

> *When I went to school I came back at 18 :00 and it was me who prepared supper. Before going to school in the morning I did the housework. I got up early to do the washing up. Finally I couldn't cope with it any more. I said to myself that I can't go on. Either I have to be left to get on with my studies or I stop studying, I didn't have time to study because of all the housework. I didn't learn my lessons because of the housework*

For other girls it was clear that their domestic responsibilities had kept them out of school. However this is also true for a great many girls who were never fostered – so one needs to be careful about how the representations of being fostered are interpreted.

So there were three responses to fostering amongst women: those who represented it as entirely unproblematic; those whose first response was one of loyalty to their foster parents and a representation of a situation of good upbringing, but where gradual resentments emerged. A third group of respondents were unequivocal about their opposition to the practice, borne out of their experience. ASRV6 had been fostered with her mother's older sister who then proceeded to foster her onto another, unrelated woman

> *You know, if I had been with my parents, my mother and father, they would have looked after me so that I would succeed in my studies. There, where I was fostered it was in terrible conditions, I arrived to school late, when I needed school equipment they weren't bought for me. I had to go and find my maternal grand-mother in the market so that she could give me the money for my school equipment….after my aunt had fostered me to this woman I was brought up in bad conditions, I was beaten hard*

Such was her reaction to the practice of fostering that she later said

> *If I were president I would order every parent to raise their own child because fostering is a bad practice. Every child should be brought up by its own parents. That way the child will have the right qualities. With its parents the child will have the advantage of a good upbringing. You won't be a thief. My experience of being fostered has meant that I would never have fostered out my children. Honestly, I would not foster out my child. I would not foster out my child because I was a victim. My childhood was lived in terrible conditions*

Several other women who had been fostered, whether they represented their experience as good or bad, were quite adamant that they would not foster out their own children and this is probably the most reliable test of their experience. Since even those who represented their fostering as unproblematic, generally did not intend to repeat the

experience for their own children, we have a suggestion that their positive representation may not be entirely truthful and that they didn't want to be disloyal to their foster parents in public. Several were quite vehement about their own intentions

SRRV1 , woman aged 33, married to migrant, no children, secondary school

I and if you have children yourself will you do the same thing[foster them out] ? R (very quickly) Ah no, no. That, never, never, never. Never foster out my children. I would not foster my children out even to my own sister. I'm going to bring up my children myself

3.2.1 Who fosters girls and why?

The literature on fostering in Africa focuses on different motives for fostering: rectifying demographic imbalances – whereby those with too many small children give them out to women with inadequate supplies such as infertile or post menopausal women; to allow children to be close to schools; for domestic help and also in the case of maternal death. Most of the cases encountered here were fostered with grandmothers, older sisters or aunts (both paternal and maternal). One woman was sent to a cousin in Dakar. The only case of a girl being fostered with a non-relative was the girl (see ASRV6 above) who was first fostered to her mother's older sister and then passed on to a friend who treated her so badly. Obviously we are only getting the perspectives from the fostered child, now adult – but in terms of motivation, obligations towards kin are clearly very important. In small town Senegal, if a senior person asks you to do something you do not want to do, it is very difficult to argue or refuse. Thus it seems that in many cases the parents do not necessarily relinquish their children willingly but because they are pressured by the norms of acceptable behaviour.

I was told that my mother showed a lot of respect to her older sisters. She didn't even want to foster out her children, but she fostered me to her older sister who then fostered me to another person. My mother did not even like what her sister was doing but because she was her " kilifeu" (kin authority) she couldn't refuse.

Woman ASRV6

I cried until I was lying on the ground to try and make my father send me to school. He said he had already fostered me out. I was fostered with my aunt. 'I will not send you to school, if you want you ask her to send you to school'. My aunt had a daughter of my age that she had fostered out to her mother. **Woman**

This latter case was clearly nothing to do with demographic imbalances nor with access to school – but was much more about exchanging daughters as a way of demonstrating and consolidating kinship links. In this case neither of the two fostered girls went to school although other children in the family were educated. A further example demonstrates the powerlessness of children faced with the strong social pressures of obedience to parents.

No it wasn't easy, because leaving your parents to go and live in another family is never easy. But we couldn't, we couldn't… (hesitates) …object. We had to accept our parents' orders. It's our….it was like that that we were brought up and so I couldn't refuse, I had to accept but it was not something that I liked. That life wasn't easy but it taught me many things.

Woman, aged 33, lycee, married to migrant; interview in French

In the same way that some mothers felt obliged to surrender their children, older children who were being fostered felt unable to express their opposition – because of the very strong pressure in Senegalese society to obey one's elders without question.

Kinship enters into fostering relationships in another way too: in several cases a girl who had been fostered into a household ended up marrying into that household. It was never entirely clear if that was one of the ultimate motives for the fostering but it was clearly a not infrequent outcome – if not without problems. SBSS2 who was fostered with kin after her mother died and ultimately married her second cousin in that household responded when asked to talk about her marriage:

> *Ah. You know you have to accept what you get, it was a marriage between kin. They just give you what's necessary, what they think is right.* **Woman**

Another case where a man recounted how he had married a girl who had been fostered into his household was also not entirely happy:

> *She had been fostered with us… she had been fostered with her aunt. After the death of my first wife I was given her as a wife… After a domestic quarrel she went to stay with her family of origin, with her real mother. Whilst bringing her back again to our place in the village her mother wanted to force me to go and discuss with the girl's uncles. I told her that I refused because earlier they had fostered the girl to my family and it was my half-brother who had given her to me as a wife with the family's approval. Thus he should be the sole intermediary to solve the problem. She (my wife's mother) threatened to break up the marriage. I told her that everything depended on her and thus my mother-in-law broke up my marriage.* **Man MTRV10**

This example is clearly a case of fostering where all rights in the child had been handed over to the foster parents. Yet it also demonstrates some of the ambivalences created by the fact that fostering arrangements are usually between kin and there is continuous contact with the birth family. Although traditional lines of authority and responsibility are clear, the fostered person may try to challenge them because she sees herself as suffering and as a pawn.

3.3 Fostered boys

Far fewer men talked about being fostered in childhood. However it is not at all clear that this is because they were not fostered or just because the life history approach did not pick up being fostered as something which merited comment by men. All the evidence, both from elsewhere in the interviews and from other studies in West Africa (Ba 2003, Pilon 2003, Vandermeersch 2002) boys are fostered out almost as often as girls – and given the research took place in a small town which until recently was the only of secondary education for substantial area, and would have been a magnet for both primary school and apprenticeships – it is very likely that many of the male respondents had been fostered as children.

For those men who did talk about it, boys' experience of fostering was generally more positive and is more likely to have been associated with schooling or apprenticeship

rather than domestic exploitation. There are contrasts by gender in the experience of fostering – as in all aspects of childhood. Whereas for girls fostering is at best neutral and at worst exploitative because they are unable to attend school due to the weight of domestic work, for boys fostering can lead to a reduction in adult control – especially if the boy ends up in a household where there is no man to take responsibility for his upbringing. Below a young man explains how he lived a fairly wild youth in the south of Senegal with his elderly aunt who was too old to be able to control him.

> ***ABRV5 : man aged 23, unmarried, secondary school, electrician***
> *R : I was a Muslim there and it is difficult because it is hard to be pious there. That's why my father wanted me to leave that town and come back here.*
> *I : Why do you say it's difficult to be pious in Ziguinchor ?*
> *R : There there are lots of bars and also we lived in the town centre at B. There were lots of bars*
> *I :Was it your idea to leave Louga to go to Ziguinchor ?*
> *R : I was taken there but, you know, when you are young you love travelling. But when I arrived I was very happy there.*
> *I : why ?*
> *R : Because down there, it's another sort of life. I had more freedom, I could do all I wanted. I was with my aunt and she was old [too old to supervise him and control him]*

With the exception of this case, most men's references to fostering suggests that it is far more about developing boys' own economic prospects than about maintaining and supporting kinship and other social links between households – although that is not to say that such networks are not used both in the placing of boys and exploited subsequently. Apprenticeships, schooling and koranic school are the key dimensions of boy fostering and in the examples discussed in most cases the responsible adult was unrelated but would be of economic advantage to the fostered boy.

3.4 Comparing boys and girls

To suggest that the fostering of boys and girls is fundamentally different would be to misrepresent the situation. Firstly we need to recognize that our respondents varied in age so we are talking about heterogeneous events that may have spanned 40 or 50 years. The practice seems highly gendered, with boys being placed for training and in the economic sphere and girls as domestic labour. But, until very recently, at least outside the capital, girls' main role in Senegal was in the domestic sphere, as both wife and a mother. Thus both sexes were receiving what was generally seen as gender appropriate training for adulthood. The dissatisfaction on the part of women is largely because new roles – that of educated women and women in the labour force have emerged whereas behaviour around fostering girls has largely remained in the sphere of more traditional gender roles: hence the resentment of women who feel that their childhoods were lost or spoilt because they did not receive training (ie education) appropriate for the modern world. Men who did get that support either recognized it or did not even bother to talk about it because it was not an issue.

4. Absent migrant fathers

Given the emphasis all adults place on the necessity of good parental or foster parent input into child upbringing, how does this sit with the fact that in a town where a substantial minority of young and middle aged men have migrated to Italy, many children are being brought up with a largely absent father? Is this sort of absent parent seen as similar to the situation of fostering or different? Our data here depend more on observations by others than on the experiences of the children of absent fathers themselves.

It was generally felt that the absence of a father was problematic (despite the fact that there were usually other adult male kin around). This was both surprising given the positive attitudes to kin involvement in child raising, and because the kinship system means that many related adults can be called father or mother, and expected given the respect that children, especially sons, are expected to show their fathers, and the expectation that mothers and fathers have different and complementary roles in child upbringing. Yet there was a recognition that men faced a dilemma because of the lack of local employment and the dreams of financial security and success that migration could bring. So although people might regret the absence of fathers and be aware of the social problems that could lead to in the next generation and the changes in values, they would never condemn a man for migrating. Furthermore the financial benefits of male migration for the whole family were often seen to advantage migrants' children. Since the main role of a Senegalese father is the economic provision for his wife and children (Antoine and Dial 2005) it is hardly surprising that the merits of male emigration were talked about much more than the problems posed by men's absence.

> **SBRV8, woman married, 48, husband and son both migrants**
> *I : When he left did that change anything in the family ?*
> *R : Yes, things changed because he was able to provide for the children, and build the house.*

There were a few, rare cases where the economics benefits of migration was not seen to outweigh the disadvantages of an absent father for moral upbringing.

> **ABSS9 man, 30, secondary educated, unmarried, no migrant in close family**
> *R : It's very true that emigration has its advantages but there are also lots of disadvantages. Because this is a town where people love competing with each other….On the other hand there's a positive side for them (the migrants) but it's their families that they leave here who are so bloody annoying for everyone.*
> *I How ?*
> *R because they are badly brought up. If there is no authority the house will be a total mess. That's what you see, the disastrous side of migration… Money can't solve all the problems. There are problems like good upbringing which need a father's presence.*

The interaction of absent fathers with the dominant perception of appropriate gender roles of the parents in children's upbringing presents a contradictory picture. The absent male migrant, who perceives himself as the head of the family and his wife as someone who

just has to obey his wishes can believe that in his absence she will just obey his orders and the children will obey hers because they emanate from the head of the family.

ABRV3 Married man, 2 children, migrant
R Ah, yes, but when I'm not there I phone to tell my wife to bring them up like I want, with our religion. Because the child only becomes what we make him.

However there is substantial evidence from our interviews that in fact the wives left behind face considerable problems in exercising discipline and many are bereft of any sort of authority when they are left without their husband's support in their marital household which is his natal household. Several women observed that, despite frequent telephone calls, migrants' wives tended to be very vulnerable – facing demands from their absent husbands on the one hand, undermined by their in-laws on the other, and frequently unable to discipline the children as they might want given the absence of the perceived substantial paternal authority.

ABRV9 Married teacher age 32
R : Supervision outside the classroom, it's not an issue of being a migrant or a non migrant, it depends on the person. For example I could be there and not supervise my children and if I have this attitude when I'm in Senegal I don't think I'm going to change my behaviour once I arrive in Europe. On the other hand I could stay here, be a non-migrant and control my child. So for supervision that depends. Now there are émigrés who send money so that their children are supervised. But the problem which arises is that you can invest money in the child, believing that he will go to school and follow extra lessons at home with the tutor, whereas if as an emigrant you're not going to see his teacher, not going to see his tutor to check that the child turns up, it's no good. So you have to oversee and control the child both from near and from far away.

ABSS1 19 year old male in secondary school
I Does a migrant's departure change anything in the way his children are brought up ?
R Of course it has an influence. If you have a daughter, or even a son who you leave here, it can completely wreck their upbringing, the child will only do what it wants – especially girls. If their mothers are careless then you need to worry

ABSS3 Man, 68, polygamous, primary education whose son is a migrant
R It's not good…your children won't know you, nor will your kin. And then your children won't be brought up as you would like because you're never in one place for any time. .....
I What happens if the children don't know their father well enough?
R It's dangerous because the way men contribute to a child's upbringing is different to women. A child is more frightened of his father than his mother. That's the danger because upbringing is crucial. It's the fashion to emigrate but if there was work here so that the young didn't leave it would be better. But as there's no work the young have to go.

Migrant wives with dependent children are often placed in a very difficult situation. The roles of parents are strongly gendered with men expected to be disciplinarians. With their husbands absent women are sometimes expected to play a more authoritative role, but more often they just have their power of management and control over legitimate domains of child upbringing wrested from them. Furthermore the fact that their absent husbands frequently send remittances not to their wives but to their own kin means that migrants' wives may actually have very limited direct access to resources. They are unable to criticize their husband's male kin who may treat them or their children badly, because of this financial dependence.

> **Married woman, 37, Husband in Italy**
> *When he [husband's nephew who is responsible for them in her husband's absence]comes home in the evening, when the children need to rest, he tells them to sweep the house. Even though when they get up in the morning they clean everything well When he (the nephew) comes back he wants to hit the children for no reason at all. All because he doesn'thave any respect for me.*

> **Migrant male, age 30-49, married**
> *In my case once my wife had had children, when I'm not here it's her who represents me here, she takes care of the children [two daughters] because they are ours. When I phone it's she who tells me what is lacking and what I need to give. The prophet says that he who has a family must look after them. Oh yes, so* ***when I am not there I phone to tell my wife to bring them up in the way I want****, in our religion, because the child only become what one creates from it.*

Even though at first this migrant man at first seems to consider his wife as fully responsible for the upbringing of their children in his absence, this is then qualified by his emphasis on how he wants to control this.

Although most people may see the ideal situation as being one where both parents raise their biological children, in fact in Senegal this has always been only one of many possibilities and thus the widespread male migration to Europe should be able to be accommodated. The advent of mobile phones may have undermined women's de facto domestic power in the absence of husbands – although phones may also diminish the role of the men's kin in child rearing decisions, through allowing rapid communication with the father.

5. Conclusions

There are multiple forms of parent-child separation in Senegal with different implications for responsibility, well-being and general social attitudes all highly dependent on context. An algorithm approach using survey data can do little more than identify the cross-sectional scale or parent-child separation and these separations are diverse should not be given a blanket classification of 'fostering'. The general attitude that children belong to the community and kin and are not just the responsibility of their parents remains strong, but there is clear evidence that biological parents in fact are seen to have particular responsibilities for their children and that these responsibilities generate

ambivalence with regard to parent child separation which can be represented both as harmful, yet also as a way of fulfilling parental obligations to kin and paternal obligations to provide for their offspring. In terms of fostering (rather than migration induced separation) such ambivalence is much more marked for girls than boys.

Although many people were fostered during their own childhood, and the practice continues, as shown by the frequent references to fostered children in the compound, when asked directly most people denied that they would ever foster out their own children. Despite the rhetoric of children belonging to the community, and shared responsibility for children, parental responsibility for child upbringing was seen as very important and not something easily delegated to others. Yet this sits uneasily with the high frequency of fostering in the recent past alongside the frequent presence of foster children. What is clear is that although some fostering was because of parental death (and in those cases the fostered children were generally positive about their experience) other fostering was less about parents choosing that others should bring up their children and more about parents being socially unable to deny kin who requested a child.

People face dilemmas in bringing up children. The respect and submission that people are required to show older kin, the fact that it is almost impossible socially to refuse a request from some kin coupled with the desire to reinforce links of solidarity and of support, means that parents cannot refuse the request for a child. The other side of this means that frequent mobility of children and their easy assimilation in other families facilitates familial care and integration of orphaned children.

In most cases fostering is represented as being a function of social obligations – although in the case of girls there is always the expectation that she will contribute to domestic work – reflecting the expectations for girls in their parental home. It is rare that fostering is seen as an economic response to, for example, an inability to care for all one's own children, although, unusually, this respondent sees fertility control as a way of avoiding the necessity of fostering with the implication that the biologically constituted family is best.

> *R : these days a large number of children is nothing but a source of worries.*
> *I : Why ?*
> *R : Yes, there are lots of needs that you may not be able to satisfy That means that you may be forced to foster out one child here and another there. Better to limit them beforehand so that you can manage them without too much difficulty and you can all live in good conditions.* **MTRV9 Man, 43, metalworker**

Although fostering related child mobility is frequent it is not generally regarded as particularly beneficial for the child by most parents who now want to bring up their own children and thus have a significant input into their upbringing and moral teaching. It can theoretically be advantageous for the child whose foster parent puts him or her through school. However in no accounts did female respondents ascribe great success at school to earlier fostering whereas many more respondents believed that their achievements at school were either despite fostering, or inadequate supervision or excessive domestic demands made had led to them dropping out of school early.

In Senegal schooling is now an integral part of childhood and educational success is seen as something which increasingly requires parental input in the form of supervision and resources. Parents are under pressure to invest in their own children and although the wider kin networks remain important there is a nuclearisation of responsibilities and expectations from parents which is contributing to fertility decline and smaller more nuclear households (Randall & LeGrand 2003). Hence, in the face of other rapid social change there are worries that the prolonged absence of fathers and the absence of moral guidance and discipline will have serious repercussions for the next generation. Furthermore this migration and the resources it is bringing in itself a major driver of an increased individualisation and residential nuclearisation.

Social change and an increased nuclearisation of families in urban areas has been shown, in Dakar, to be contributing to fertility decline because modern life and children are seen to need the space and the right environment for children to grow up away from bad influences (Randall & LeGrand 2003). This is not yet the situation for most residents of T for whom kinship links and constant contact and exchange with a large kin group remain a critical part of the local support networks and dominant values. However despite the continuing prevalence of fostering there is strong opposition to the practice from many mothers – especially those who felt that they personally suffered in terms of both childhood happiness and their education from the practice and one can envisage that, as in the more elite populations in Dakar the practice may diminish. On the other hand it may just take new forms as educated professional parents are obliged to work in different places or to travel extensively for their work.

People also question other forms of parent-child separation where the parent moves for economic reasons. Yet this too is not new – adult male labour migration and seasonal labour migration have been prevalent in Senegal and elsewhere in the Sahel for at least a century and fathers have often been separated from their children. What is new is the context in which this is happening. In the last century adult male labour migration was part of an agricultural production system and the skills training that children of the absent migrants were given (in domestic work for girls and agricultural work for boys) could be provided by all members of the extended family, as could discipline. Although the extended family network remains extremely important there are elements of nuclearisation and there is certainly a feeling that the biological parents are the most appropriate person to provide certain forms of love, care, discipline and guidance. We observe a growing tension between old, traditional forms of solidarity which are still valued, and may be activated through fostering, combined with moves towards more nuclear family organization – both in terms of parental responsibilities and living arrangements. The opposition of many women to fostering for their children is part of this, as is the fact that many of the migrants' wives aspire to have their husbands build them their own house, away from his first investment in the family home. What has yet to be resolved is how the advantages of this separate living can be reconciled with the need for the resources to finance it, which are only available from migration to Europe.

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