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The Paradox of Parallel Lives

Immigration Policy and Transnational Polygyny between Senegal and France

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In Dakar, everyday conversations are filled with entertaining stories about the adventures of returning migrants. One common theme involves the visit of a Senegalese man who has returned from Europe with a foreign spouse. The most entertaining part of the story comes when the man's family and friends go to great pains to conceal the existence of another wife and children in Senegal. In one version, the Senegalese wife is introduced to the European one as the husband's "sister" or "cousin," thereby deceiving the European wife into believing that the children in the household are her husband's nieces and nephews whereas in fact they are his own children (see also Salomon 2009). The most appreciated elements of the story are usually the tricks deployed by various family members to maintain the illusion of a biological relationship between the husband and his "sister." The truth is finally revealed when, for example, a child, a family member, or a jealous rival reveals who *really* is who.

Whether fictionalized or not, this type of narrative points to the fact that many Senegalese migrants establish households in destination countries even though they have left a spouse and, sometimes, children back home. In France, these parallel family arrangements, which may be called *transnational polygyny*, are usually presented in public discourse as the remains of age-old African practices or as instrumental ways of bypassing immigration laws. Although there is a degree of truth to these assertions, this chapter presents an alternative interpretation of these marriages. Some of the spouses involved in them are former Senegalese migrants who have acquired French citizenship; however, the majority of my informants were born as French citizens.¹ Consequently, this contribution focuses on transnational polygyny involving what are usually referred to as binational or "mixed" families.²

The role of European immigration policies in shaping transnational family life is crucial. Following the end of labor migration schemes in the 1970s in old immigration

countries such as France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, marriage to a citizen or resident and family reunification more generally were among the few remaining routes for non-EU citizens to acquire long-term legal status (Beck-Gernsheim 2011; Charsley and Liversage 2012; Schmidt 2011b; Wray 2011). In France in 2011, family reunification accounted for 80,500 visas for stays of at least a year, or 40 percent of all visas granted; meanwhile, student visas accounted for 33.7 percent and work visas 9 percent (Comité interministériel de contrôle de l'immigration 2012). Undocumented migrants or migration candidates may feel that they must marry at all cost to regularize their status. Similar observations have been made in other EU countries. Fernandez (2013), for example, shows how Danish family reunification policies work against their own imperative of avoiding so-called forced marriage by making marriage the only option for binational couples to live together in Denmark.

That marriage to a citizen is one of the few legal ways to enter and establish citizenship in France may be the main reason migrant family practices have been increasingly targeted by French state regulation in the past two decades. In fact, it is increasingly through the definition of acceptable family practices that the boundaries of citizenship are redefined (Anderson 2013; Ferran 2008). In the French case, as Cole (2014c, 529) points out, public discourse on marriage and migration has generated “two kinds of opposition, one between love and money, the other between ‘French’ and ‘immigrant’ kinship.” Among the many types of immigrant kinship, polygamy—or more specifically polygyny, because it usually involves situations in which a man has several wives—has become a particular target of opprobrium in the French public sphere.

Anxieties around polygamy in Europe are not new and have long been driven by concerns with managing immigration costs, women's rights, and the perceived link between successful integration—which usually means adapting to European ways of life—and European family ideals (Charsley and Liversage 2012).³ But these anxieties have also intensified with rising anti-Muslim sentiment. In France, recent public discourse invariably presents polygamous men as individuals with low moral standards whose insufficient adherence to republican values makes them undeserving of either residency or citizenship. Several right-wing politicians blamed the 2005 French riots on the anger and moral decline produced by immigrant childhoods spent in poor, polygamous households. French Academy member Hélène Carrère d'Encausse joined the bandwagon when she explained to a TV reporter that polygamy was to blame for France's social unrest (Millot 2005):

Those people, they come directly from their African villages. But Paris and other European cities are not African villages. For example, everybody asks, why are African children in the street and not at school? Why can't their parents buy a flat? It's obvious why: many of these Africans, I'm telling you, they are polygamous. There are 3 or 4 wives and 25 children in a flat. They are so overcrowded that they are no longer flats, they are . . . God knows what! Then we know why these children roam the streets. (translation mine, from French)

In 2010, the right-wing magazine *Le Point* ran a feature on a Parisian banlieue that portrayed polygamous men as immoral oppressors. It was later revealed that the interviews with a polygamous man and with a wife in another polygamous household were carried out over the phone after the magazine failed to find individuals willing to be interviewed at home; the whole feature turned out to have been a hoax. The magazine issued an apology a few days later, but it is significant that the editors expected this negative portrayal of polygamy and immigration to appeal to its readers.

This kind of discourse lumps together all individuals of African descent regardless of their region of origin, religious affiliation, and actual citizenship (many of the individuals concerned are French citizens). It also powerfully stigmatizes Muslims of African descent by presenting their family practices as the main cause of France's increasingly palpable social unrest. Most importantly for my purposes here, however, it portrays polygamy as an atavistic practice resistant to change.

As I argue in this chapter, however, polygamy is neither atavistic nor resistant to change. Rather, family arrangements and immigration rules are mutually constituted. The increasing restrictiveness of European immigration policies means that African migrants now spend longer periods of time abroad undocumented (De Haas 2008). Without legal papers, they find making a living exceedingly difficult, a situation that has been further exacerbated in France by a new law that makes employing an undocumented migrant a criminal offense. With marriage to a citizen or resident of Europe one of the few remaining paths to regularization, some Senegalese men find that only by establishing a new family abroad to achieve legal residence can they continue caring for their families back home. Ironically, though French public discourse condemns polygamy, state regulations encourage the practice. Polygamy encompasses a wide range of practices, as Charsley and Liversage (2012, 60) note, "some of which are new constructions arising from the specific conditions of transnational migration." For many Africans in Europe, family life is not simply organized according to culturally determined practices. It is also heavily shaped by immigration regulations.

To build my argument regarding the mutual constitution of immigration policies and

transnational family practices, I draw on ethnographic material collected in France as well as in Senegal. Although both Senegalese men and women marry French citizens and migrate to France, I focus particularly on the dilemmas of Senegalese men because they are more likely than women to accumulate spouses and thus better illustrate the mutually constitutive relationship between immigration regulations and family practices.

Family Reunification Laws and Kinship Forms

My analysis builds on a substantial body of anthropological work that demonstrates how South Asian family practices and migration regulations have long shaped each other (e.g., Ballard 1990; Charsley 2005, 2006, 2013; Gardner 1995; Rytter 2013; Shaw 1988, 2000, 2001). Taken collectively, these studies establish migration patterns to Britain from specific areas in the Indian subcontinent as rooted in the employment of sailors on British ships, postwar labor policies, the mass displacement of populations due to the partition of India in 1947, the war between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1971, and development projects across the region. In the early 1960s, for example, one hundred thousand residents of the Mirpur area of Pakistan were displaced following the construction of the Mangla dam. In 1961, Pakistan removed its restriction on emigration so that five thousand dispossessed villagers might move to the United Kingdom before passage of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962 (Charsley 2013). Thereafter, access became restricted to the family members of those already settled in Britain, which reinforced migration from certain parts of Pakistan to specific areas in the United Kingdom (Shaw 1988).

Because there were few other legal options for migration and because of a preference in Pakistan for endogamous cousin marriage or marriage within status groups, transnational marriage became the norm among British Pakistani families (Shaw 2001; see also Ballard 1990; Gardner 1993 for analyses involving migrants from other parts of the Indian subcontinent). Even laws that required migrant spouses to demonstrate that they did not marry for the sole purpose of emigrating to the United Kingdom did not deter Pakistani transnational marriage (Wray 2011). During the 1960s–1990s, then, restrictive immigration policies and family reunification rules actually encouraged transnational marriages arranged by relatives, which often involved siblings marrying off their children to each other.

Now that transnational marriage has become more restricted across the European Union and it is much more difficult to sponsor a spouse from Pakistan, these types of marriages have gone from being the norm in Britain and other European countries in the late

1990s to being much less popular (Charsley 2013). In part, their decline is due to a rising public focus on forced marriage, which has led to a shift in how some younger Pakistani women evaluate the nature of parental influence on marital choices (Charsley 2013, 11). Some women who did not describe their marriage as “forced” a few years ago do so now, and divorce is openly talked about as a possible exit from arranged marriages with relatives “back home.” Mikkel Rytter (2013) also observed a decline in transnational marriage between Danish Pakistanis and spouses from Pakistan in the wake of Denmark’s implementation of strict marriage migration rules in the early 2000s. Both Charsley and Rytter document a shift toward marriages between young diasporic Pakistanis, sometimes across European national borders.

These studies point to the malleability of kinship practices as they interact with social, economic, and legal changes. But they also show that kinship practices can be more resilient than expected because people feel strongly about transmitting their notions of relatedness to the next generation. Indeed, people may even use legal or economic changes to protect valued practices, as has been the case among some South Asian groups in Europe. Less well documented are the ways state policies affect marriages that cross linguistic, ethnic, and national boundaries between people who represent “the first links between families and social entities sharing little common culture or heritage” (Williams 2012, 32). Yet such mixed marriages are increasingly common globally, giving rise to new “world families” involving multiple forms of boundary crossing and intimacy at a distance (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2014). In addition, binational and cross-cultural marriages are likely to throw what Carol Stack and Linda Burton (1994, 157) call “kin-work”—that is, the “labor and the tasks which families need to survive from generation to generation”—into particular relief, because it is often when boundaries are crossed that people work the hardest at ensuring social reproduction.

Between Family and the State: Senegalese Men and Transnational Polygamy

When discussing parallel families with Senegalese men and women in France, I remembered conversations I had taken part in while doing fieldwork with performing artists in Dakar. On one occasion, in the mid-2000s, I sat in my flat with a small group of male performers I knew well. As often happened when they met, the conversation soon turned to their dreams of mobility. These men found that their applications for visas that would allow them to travel

abroad for dance festivals were all too often rejected, and they bitterly resented the immobility that was forced on them. One of them announced that he intended to find a European woman to marry—as a second wife, given that he was already married and had children in Senegal. He hoped to meet a woman holidaying in Senegal so that she might do the work of applying for a spousal visa for him, a common pattern among the young men who forge relationships with older European women in the region's coastal resorts (Ebron 1997; Salomon 2009). But he was also prepared to court someone while on tour abroad. He explained to me that marrying a European woman would make it possible for him to travel freely and succeed in his artistic career, ambitions he shared with the other men in the group. Besides, he said, he was tired of working hard for little gain and felt he needed to experience something new.

A lively debate on the pros and cons of polygyny ensued as some of the men expressed similar desires to marry Europeans while others warned against the risks inherent in the practice. The oldest in the group, a married Catholic man in his late thirties, agreed that migrating legally was far more desirable than going off into the world undocumented. Many performers who had done so had been forced to give up their artistic dreams. However, he added, polygyny was never a good arrangement because it took “at least ten years off” the lives of most men: cowives were known to engage in occult practices to harm their rivals or their children. Polygynous arrangements, he explained, were ultimately harmful because “something [had] to be sacrificed,” usually at the expense of the husband's well-being. The others agreed, their laughter echoing against the walls of the small flat. One of them pointed out that the speaker's view was that of a Catholic who had to make the best out of being bound to a single woman, an unfortunate fate indeed. Others added that they could never afford the marriage payments and bridewealth required to wed several brides let alone the daily expenses needed to support multiple households. One man added, amid general laughter, that it might be less costly to marry a divorcée or a mature and wealthy woman.

By then, the conversation had become heated, with the men's voices growing ever louder. The performer who had first spoken of marrying a European was beaming with pleasure, pointing out that the others' arguments just proved that his was an excellent idea: having a wife in Europe in addition to his Senegalese spouse would allow him to travel freely as well as grant him prestige, all without requiring a bride price (the men all concurred that European women did not like to be “purchased”). Moreover, a European woman, they agreed, would be unlikely to engage in occult practices. How could marrying one not be an attractive proposition? At the time, I thought the initial speaker was joking. A few years later,

however, he traveled to France with another dance group, overstayed his visa, and eventually married a French woman, much to the dismay of his Senegalese wife. The marriage to the French woman soon failed, but by then the man had been granted settlement in France, and he initiated a relationship with another French lady. While his Senegalese wife had tolerated the first relationship, I was told that she requested a divorce when he found a second French partner instead of returning home, as she had hoped he would. The problem with the situation in which she found herself was not simply that her husband was away but that, according to the Wolof preference for patrilocality, she and her children lived with her in-laws. Far from enjoying the autonomy one might expect a migrant's wife to have, she had been forced to trade her husband's companionship for the surveillance of his relatives (see also Hannaford 2015).

Although the man in this case emphasized his personal dilemmas, Senegalese men's migration is always a family matter (Barou 2001; Beauchemin, Caarls, and Mazzucato 2013; Riccio 2001). Senegalese migrants have always been expected to care for their families back home, and, if anything, translocal and transnational marriages have increased rather than diminished these expectations (Cole and Groes, introduction to this volume). Families expect that migrant kin will send monetary remittances, take responsibility for the education of younger siblings, pay for the treatment of sick and aging relatives, or finance the pilgrimage of a parent to Mecca (Buggenhagen 2012; Gasparetti 2011; Riccio 2001). In addition, family members expect their migrant sons and husbands to keep in touch with them by phone and through Skype (see also Fesenmyer 2012; Parreñas 2005a). Communication may be considered just as important as money transfers, particularly if those left behind include spouses, children, and aging parents (see also Kea, this volume). Several migrants' relatives whom I visited in Senegal remarked on those who continued to communicate regularly after years abroad. Family members often suspect those who fail to do so of either not caring about them or trying to conceal their engagement in criminal activities. At any rate, lack of communication compromises migrants' reputations. Such expectations weigh most heavily on men, although increased female migration means that women too are expected to care for their families and to communicate on a regular basis.

The expectations placed on migrants cannot be entirely explained by relatives' assumption that they earn a good living abroad, although this is obviously an important factor. In addition, parents and kin who contribute to a person's education and opportunities for travel expect to enjoy reciprocal forms of care when that person achieves success (Coe 2013; Cole 2010; Groes-Green 2014). Migration, or, more accurately, achieving a mobile

lifestyle, is a costly endeavor because migrants must often pay intermediaries substantial sums of money to acquire even a short-term visa. Migrants, therefore, not only must live up to social obligations of exchange within their families but also are indebted to all those who have lent them money toward the migration project. These multiple levels of debt and social obligation often place unbearable pressure on migrants, many of whom struggle abroad for years to make ends meet, particularly if they end up with undocumented status. In recent years the economic decline in much of Europe has exacerbated these difficulties, particularly for those Senegalese living in countries such as Italy and Spain and more recently Portugal and Greece (Beauchemin, Caarls, and Mazzucato 2013; Heil 2013; Riccio 2001). Although Senegalese at home have become more aware of the hardships migrants experience, not least through the testimonies of those who have returned or been deported, there is nevertheless an enduring association between spatial and social mobility: success in life involves the capacity to move freely. But aspirations of mobility are often thwarted by the severe restrictions placed on migration by European states. Migrants must overcome these restrictions if they are to meet their family's expectations and succeed.

Senegalese Kinship and Marriage Repertoires

My friend's conviction that finding a French woman to marry as a second wife might solve his mobility problems draws from some long-standing practices in the region. Although the statistics should be treated with caution,⁴ the most recent Demographic and Health Survey notes that 35 percent of married women in Senegal live in polygynous unions,⁵ three-quarters of which involve two wives (ANSD 2012). The use of a single term to designate a wide range of marriage arrangements, however, conceals the dynamic character of the practice cross-culturally (cf. Charsley and Liversage 2012; Clignet 1987; Zeitzen 2008). David Parkin's (1978) pioneering study of social change among Luo speakers in Kenya in the 1960s and 1970s, for example, showed how, by rotating wives between rural and urban households, Luo adapted polygyny to facilitate rural-urban migration while protecting land ownership. In the Senegambian region, low population density, caused in part by the transatlantic slave trade, led to a relative shortage of labor (Searing 1993). These circumstances likely made polygyny attractive as a way for big landowning lineages to accumulate women and children (Ames 1955; Diop 1985). From this perspective, polygyny became the ultimate expression of the "wealth-in-people" ethos well documented across Atlantic Africa (e.g., Guyer 1993).

Although it is likely that polygyny has always encompassed a wide range of practices,

in the past few decades its role in facilitating spatial mobility has grown in importance. Having households in several locations can enable men to migrate while also retaining claims to land and belonging in their regions of origin. With mass migration to Senegalese cities occurring from the 1950s onward, polygyny became valued as a way of facilitating translocal family life (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1995; Buggenhagen 2012).⁶ But it was also transformed because the cost of living in cities did not always allow migrant men to establish new households there; in several cases I have come across, men who had married and established their own household in their region of origin had moved into an urban wife's compound, which had either been inherited from her parents, received from a previous marriage, or built for her by a migrant son. In these cases, mature men who had migrated to the city as young men but had not yet accumulated sufficient resources to establish second households benefited from the prestige of polygyny without paying the costs.⁷

Just as polygamy has a long and varied history in the region, so too does marriage with Europeans. During the slave trade and the early colonial period, many French traders and military officers developed relationships with African women (Jones 2013; White 1999), who came to enjoy a privileged status as intermediaries in coastal cities (see Bois 1997 for a similar pattern in Madagascar). The creole families that emerged from these unions subsequently enjoyed a special status as a midlevel bourgeoisie during the colonial period. With the establishment of formal colonial rule, the French administration discouraged these unions, but they were soon replaced by interracial marriages with a different gender dynamic as Senegalese men began marrying French women during prolonged stays in France. My interviews with several generations of informants, as well as the biographies of prominent Senegalese figures throughout the twentieth century, indicate that such unions initially involved Senegalese who had traveled to France to study (Neveu Kringelbach 2015). Following World War I, sailors and former soldiers from all over francophone West Africa who traveled to France met women and established families there. For a long time, then, marriage with a French woman was perceived as the prerogative of the elite Senegalese male.

Did polygyny exist in Euro-Senegalese marriages in earlier generations? According to my interviewees, it certainly did but it has not been documented in scholarly studies. It is however, depicted in novels, most famously Mariama Bâ's *Un chant écarlate* (1984). In this tale of ill-fated love, the Senegalese novelist powerfully captures the intrusion of polygyny into a Franco-Senegalese marriage. Ousmane and Mireille, the novel's young couple, live in Dakar, where they met as students. Unhappy with their daughter's choice of partner, Mireille's French expatriate parents reject her. But it is ultimately the arrival of a second

wife, encouraged by Ousmane's mother, that destroys the union. My interviewees noted that the need to obtain legal immigration status seldom encouraged polygamy in earlier generations. Rather, it seems to have occurred when Senegalese men who had married in Europe during their youth returned to Senegal later in life and sought to reinsert themselves into local networks and fulfill familial expectations.⁸

In more recent years, marriage to Europeans has extended beyond the educated elite to include performers (Neveu Kringelbach 2013a), people employed in the NGO sector, football players, former soldiers, school leavers with secondary-level education, and many others.⁹ At the same time, urban Senegalese are increasingly aspiring to companionate marriage, a trend captured in songs and other forms of popular culture. Among Wolof-speaking populations there used to be a marked preference for cross-cousin marriage (Buggenhagen 2012; Diop 1985), reflected in the use of the old-fashioned Wolof term *wurusu jabar*, or “wife of gold,” to designate a cross-cousin. I have come across many such cross-cousin marriages in Dakar, particularly among individuals now in their fifties and older. Today, however, there is a clear movement away from cross-cousin marriage and from marriages arranged by relatives more generally, across all ethnic groups and social classes (see Dial 2008, 74–79), a pattern consistent with rising aspirations to companionate marriage in other parts of Africa (Cole and Thomas 2009) and globally (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). As “a marital ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be both one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced” (Wardlow and Hirsch 2006, 4), companionate marriage is usually understood as incompatible with polygamy. Yet, in urban and rural Senegal alike, rising aspirations to companionate marriage coexist with polygyny, a coexistence that men, in particular, may valorize (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1995). In fact, men's marriage ideals have diversified: whereas some men prefer monogamy, others still hold polygyny as an ideal but with wives of their choosing and with several years separating each union. In many parts of the country, men still see having two wives as a sign of success, although they rarely have the resources to accumulate wives before they reach their late forties (Mondain, Legrand, and Delaunay 2004).¹⁰ Given the long history in the region of marriage to Europeans, it is easy to see how some Senegalese men may want to practice transnational polygyny as a way to benefit from family reunification rules and therefore migrate (or remain abroad if already there) legally.

Transnational Polygyny as a Migration Strategy: Djamal and Amadou

Djamal's and Amadou's stories exemplify how the demands of family life in Senegal converge with current European laws to make finding a European wife a possible migration strategy. I had known Djamal in Senegal for several years before he started traveling to France on a regular basis, using his existing connections there to obtain short-term business visas. At first, Djamal told me he traveled specifically for business, and he did make useful connections abroad. However, he actually spent more time visiting friends and trying to make new acquaintances than conducting formal business. He eventually admitted that his main objective in traveling was to meet a European (though not necessarily French) woman whom he could marry. He also explained that his wife back home, whom I knew well, approved of his plans: "She's a good friend to me, she understands me. She has followed me into everything since we got married. I trust her," he said.

It turned out that Djamal told me about his quest because he hoped I might introduce him to a suitable person: he wanted to meet a generous and selfless person who would accept his devotion to a minority movement within the Tijaaniyya, one of Senegal's main Sufi *tariqas*, or "paths." He also expressed his fear of being stuck in a bad relationship with a woman with mental health problems, as he said had happened to a number of his friends.

Many of the women who are interested in us [African men] over here [in Europe], they're a bit lost. Some of them are crazy, like my friend's wife whom I told you about. I met her parents at the wedding. They're good people, but she's . . . she's not well in the head, you know. And it's tough for him [the Senegalese husband]. I'm very afraid of that. Because the women we met over here, you know, often they're the ones who have problems.

Migrant men like Djamal often place their wives back home under intense remote surveillance, as Hannaford (2015) has also observed. Ironically, they also complain about the surveillance that European wives and girlfriends subject them to, which they think compromises their masculinity.¹¹

Djamal's request that I help him find a good woman, then, was an attempt to minimize the risk of making a poor choice in a cultural context in which he found it difficult to assess women's qualities during his short visits. Another somewhat younger Senegalese man, in his midthirties, expressed similar concerns to me but focused more explicitly on the perceived risks of such a relationship.

Most of the women here, once you're married, they want to be the boss. They want to decide everything, and they want to know everything you're doing all the time. Like [name of his

girlfriend at the time]. If I'm going into town, after fifteen minutes she calls me to know what I'm doing. If I don't answer the phone, then later she yells at me. It's really hard with white women. Back home it's not like that, you're not accountable to your wife all the time like that.

When I visited Djamal's wife on a subsequent trip to Dakar, I discreetly brought up the topic of transnational polygyny. She looked at me inquisitively and asked whether I knew that her husband was indeed hoping to find a wife in Europe. She then explained that she had nothing against his plans since she had always expected to have a cowife at some point. For her, a European cowife was preferable to a Senegalese one close to home.

It's OK if he's going to take another wife, I don't have a problem with that. But when you love someone, and you see him with another woman, no matter how much you're prepared, it hurts . . . So it's better if she's far away.

While Djamal sought a European wife during his trips to Europe, Amadou, a tremendously gifted drummer I knew from my previous research, was able to find a European spouse to enable his migration without ever traveling abroad, thanks in large part to his artistic talent. When I met him, he was openly courting women from various parts of the world who traveled to Senegal for drumming lessons. He had relationships with several of them, and during my visits to his home, I sometimes heard him engage in long-distance phone conversations with them. His wife of many years, with whom he had several children, did not seem to mind the frenzy of female activity around her husband, and Amadou confirmed to me that she agreed with his plan to marry a foreign woman. Like Djamal's wife, she believed that a foreign wife living far away was less likely than one nearby to cause domestic trouble. But she also supported him, Amadou said, because she believed a mobile life for him would ultimately be beneficial to the entire family.

Sustaining relationships over the phone proved more difficult than Amadou had expected, and most ended within months of the women returning to their home countries. His quest was eventually successful, however, when a woman who was already a trained drummer came to take lessons with him. She came not from France but from a country where a musician Amadou knew had settled, married, and taught West African drumming. Amadou had been recommended to her as an excellent teacher, and she came with high expectations. In fact, she told me so herself when I met her, a few weeks after she had arrived. By then, she and Amadou had already married through a ceremony performed at his local mosque. Amadou described her as a generous woman with high moral standards who was keen to help his first wife and children improve their living conditions. The new wife spoke little French

and no Wolof at all, and she marveled at the thought that she and Amadou had fallen in love at first sight even though they did not share a common language. She also praised Amadou's first wife, now her cowife, whom she found to be a "wonderful, very welcoming" person. A drumming teacher herself, she was also thrilled at the prospect of going back to her drumming school with a musician of Amadou's caliber.

I was surprised at the speed with which their relationship had developed. People in the performing scene in Dakar seemed less so, but the news that both Amadou and his new wife seemed to have found what they were looking for was the talk of the town for a short while. After waiting many months for his visa, Amadou moved abroad with his second wife, leaving his first wife and children behind in a compound they shared with several of their relatives. Since then, Amadou and his new wife have had a child, he has pursued a fairly successful transnational career as a musician, and having been granted settlement in his new country of residence, he is able to travel back home every year. When I last heard about him, he was planning to bring his eldest child to live in Europe with him.

As I suggest above, French public discourse often portrays African Muslim men as immoral, oppressive husbands, unable to move on from obsolete family practices such as polygyny. In contrast to this perspective, Senegalese men such as Djamal and Amadou often frame their search for a European wife in moral terms. In fact, their discourse offers the mirror image of French public discourse. They often describe themselves as being morally upstanding individuals who risk falling prey to abusive relationships in a social context in which the new wife will enjoy a considerable advantage: she will be the one on which their legal status depends, and she will be "at home" in her own culture and will likely have the support of her family and friends should the relationship fail. Some men also feared that the wife's family would be racist and suspicious of their real intentions. Much like the Malagasy and Mozambican women depicted respectively by Cole and Groes (this volume), they often emphasized their moral qualities by speaking about their concern for their families back home. They also emphasized the particular human qualities they looked for in their future European spouse. These qualities included generosity—so that the new wife would not object to their sending remittances back home—and openness to the Muslim faith (but not necessarily the will to convert to Islam, because having a Christian wife is not usually regarded as a problem). Most thought it important that marriage not interfere with their own religious practice and hoped that any potential children would be raised as Muslims.

Parallel Families as the Outcome of “Forced Immobility”

While Djamel and Abdou sought polygamous marriages to facilitate their mobility, the story of Djibril, a young Senegalese man who grew up in Dakar and came to France in the late 2000s, illuminates how polygamy may in fact be a response to prolonged immobility. When Djibril arrived in France, he expected to work for a year or two and save money to bring home to his young wife and child in Senegal. He had lost his job a few months earlier, and with few formal qualifications, he had felt stuck. He and his family had been able to rent a small flat of their own in Dakar, but without a regular income they had been forced to move out, and his wife had returned to her parents' home. Djibril also felt a duty to care for his aging and ill mother, who he said had “suffered a lot in her life.” Like many of his peers, Djibril believed that he had no choice but to look for work abroad.

After several attempts, Djibril eventually obtained a short-term visa to enter France, and then overstayed it. He soon found small jobs, but after two years, he had been unable to save anything. His wife sent him photographs of their growing child, and they spoke by Skype and mobile phone, but this contact hardly soothed the pain of separation. As a child, Djibril explained, he had been sent away to be raised by a relative and had suffered because of the separation from his parents. He had not, therefore, wanted to impose the same experience on his own child. At the same time, his family discouraged him from returning home empty-handed, for then the sacrifice of his departure would have been in vain. Moreover, his family feared that leaving before he acquired legal status would prevent him from ever being able to return to Europe. Djibril complained often that they did not understand his predicament. Indeed, his family members in Senegal remarked to me that if life was hard in Europe, surely it was worse in Senegal. They argued that Djibril ought to pray and be patient, that a few years of hardship abroad must eventually be rewarded with legal status and a better income.

As the years passed, Djibril confessed to me that the thought of marrying in France as a way of obtaining legal status had crossed his mind. His first marriage was a Muslim one that he had not registered with the town hall. As there was no civil record of it, it would not stand in the way of a second marriage when the French state demanded proof of his “capacity to marry” as part of the civil procedures required for marriage by French law. Even when a first marriage in Senegal has been (legally) registered, people sometimes manage to bribe officials to issue a certificate attesting to their unmarried status. Djibril eventually met a

young French woman who soon became pregnant by him. A lawyer assured him that fathering a French child would likely entitle him to live in France, at least temporarily. The couple did not marry officially, but Djibril arranged for a Muslim wedding to be held for them in Senegal, a common practice in which the couple are wed in absentia by an imam at a mosque in the presence of chosen witnesses. Shortly thereafter, Djibril was granted legal status on grounds of paternity. But he was now caught in a situation he had not wanted: he had two wives, neither of whom knew about the other. He was torn because he did not want to abandon either woman or child, and he still felt the pain of not being in Senegal to see his child there grow up. With Skype as their only connection, he said, there was little left of the bond that a shared everyday life provided, and his child sometimes refused to speak to him.

Having been granted a temporary visa, Djibril traveled back to Senegal to visit his family. In many ways the trip was everything he had wanted it to be. He had been very moved to see his mother again, even though it was also painful to see how much her health had deteriorated. During his years abroad, whenever they had spoken over the phone she had expressed her fear that she might never see him again, and his decision to go back as soon as he could legally do so had much to do with her declining health. The reunion with his first wife had been emotional and difficult (as had his reunion with his child) because he had decided to tell her about the existence of the French wife. She had not taken the news well, but after a tense period, her parents intervened on Djibril's behalf: they convinced her to forgive him because he was ultimately trying to live up to his familial duty. He had no choice but to marry so as to regularize his situation in France, they argued, and as a good wife she ought to stand by him. Upon his return to France, Djibril hoped that life would be a little easier now that one of the wives knew about the other. As he explained, "If the African wife knows about the other one, that's OK. She will stay because she has no choice. But if the European wife knows about the African one, she'll just dump you. Women here can't accept that." As Amadou's story suggests, not all European women reject polygamy, but Djibril had correctly identified the power that his French wife held to determine his residency status. Much like the Malagasy women Cole depicts (this volume), he felt the strain of constantly having to manage the flow of information about his past life in Senegal to secure his future in France.

Djibril's case exemplifies the way polygamy may result from men's efforts to negotiate a protracted period of precarity with little hope of acquiring regular status and, therefore, a dignified life as someone able to care for his family back home. Djibril had not planned to have another family in France, and had he been able to move back and forth fairly

freely, he would most likely have gone back to Senegal earlier. He had always aspired to a companionate marriage with a young wife he loved, and, his own desires aside, in Dakar he would have been too young to have several wives. Ultimately, Djibril's choices were motivated by his emotional attachment to both wives and children as well as to his aging mother. That his relationship with a French woman enabled him to gain legal status, allowing him to return home to honor his commitments to his kin in Senegal, illustrates the mutual constitution of immigration rules and marriage practices.

Djibril's Senegalese wife chose to stand by him despite their joint aspiration for a nuclear family because he continued to care for her from abroad and they remained emotionally connected. In other cases I have encountered, however, the wife "left behind" did not feel sufficiently cared for to endure years of separation. For example, Aby, a young woman in her late twenties whose husband traveled to France the year after they got married, lived for several years at his parents' home in Dakar while he was away. By then, they had a young child together. Like Djibril and many other men, her husband had only planned to be away for a couple of years at most, but he was unable to save enough to return quickly and ended up staying on in France. As an undocumented worker, he found it difficult to get decent-paying jobs and only occasionally sent money to his wife and his mother. He eventually married a French woman and moved in with her, but because he did not want her to know about Aby, he rarely called home. He instructed Aby not to try to contact him. Uncared for by her husband and under the constant surveillance of her in-laws, she went back to her parents' home, leaving her child with her in-laws. Although I did not speak to the husband, his family told me that the situation was not what he had wanted. But for Aby and her husband, living parallel lives simply put too much strain on the relationship.

The Paradoxes of Transnational Polygyny

Although anthropological literature on kinship has long underscored the way states and religious institutions seek to shape families, one of the most distinctive features of the contemporary period is that families are increasingly transnational and therefore that "kin-work" (Stack and Burton 1994, 157) is increasingly contingent on cross border mobility. Senegalese migrant men find themselves caught between three forces in tension with each other: the moral economy of kinship back home, ideas about love and nuclear family in their new households, and French and other European states' desire to limit migration by setting rigid standards for what constitutes appropriate forms of love, intimacy, and family. New

family arrangements and immigration rules are mutually constituted but not in a balanced way because destination states have the legal power to decide which family practices will be regarded as acceptable (Wray 2011). Increasingly, sovereignty involves the capacity to simultaneously control human mobility within a given territory and impose specific family values and arrangements.

Alongside the resilience of polygyny in Senegal, forms of marriage in the region have also grown more diverse, and polygyny itself has been transformed by regional mobility. Younger generations, particularly women, have increasingly expressed aspirations to monogamy and companionate marriage. These aspirations are often frustrated by familial pressure on young men, and increasingly on young women, to travel abroad for a few years and send remittances back home. Because family often instigate migratory projects, many individuals end up feeling compelled to sacrifice their marital life to broader imperatives of care for the extended family. This means that men sometimes give up dreams of companionate marriage to a wife in Senegal so that they can stay in Europe. In fact, in some of the cases I have encountered, families in Senegal pressured men already married in Europe to take a second wife back home in part to ensure that the migrants' resources were not completely absorbed by their new household abroad.

In some cases, transnational polygyny in which Senegalese men have a European and a Senegalese wife emerges as migrants extend older practices of translocal polygyny to facilitate transnational migration. In other cases, however, transnational polygyny is less a premeditated strategy than an accommodation to an increasingly restrictive context. While these patterns seem to support French government discourse about African men trying to cheat the system (and their French wives) to obtain visas, I suggest that criminalizing these strategies or seeing the men who employ them as immoral is far too simplistic. Not only are these strategies produced by the absence of alternatives for regular migration, as I have argued, but marriage aspirations and ideas of love in Africa, as elsewhere, are almost always linked to a complex blend of material and sentimental concerns, including hopes for social and geographic mobility (Cole 2010; Cole and Thomas 2009; Fouquet 2007b; Groes-Green 2014; Salomon 2009). It does not make sense, therefore, to see genuine emotions and material benefits as incompatible or to assume that the men involved do not care for their European families simply because marriage is also tied to a migration project. They often feel a strong emotional attachment to their new family abroad, especially when children are born. Men end up being caught up between two families with whom they must share their resources, which inevitably leads to tensions. This is especially the case when they remain

dependent on their European spouse to renew their initial residence permit.¹² Men's very real concern for the welfare of multiple households places tremendous strain on them that European social climates, which are increasingly hostile to Muslim men, further intensify. In the Senegalese context, however, where polygyny has come to be associated with translocal migration, having a spouse and children in two places makes sense in moral terms. The entertainment value people find in stories of migrants' multiple spouses comes from the fact that the European spouse does not understand the local codes, not from the existence of parallel families.

Multiple paradoxes and contradictions follow. French public discourse condemns polygamy as immoral and incompatible with human rights, but French immigration laws actually reinforce the practice by pushing individuals into polygamous marriage if they want to stay in France so that they can support families in Senegal. The inadvertent promotion of transnational polygyny by European states also reinforces gender inequalities in Senegalese families: whereas for women, marriage to a European man excludes a marriage in Senegal, men may marry both Senegalese and European women and thus live away from home while still fulfilling familial expectations. Senegalese women who "marry out" are often forced to make more decisive choices, which may be one reason why such marriages are regarded with more ambivalence than the ones described in this chapter. This gendered inequality may also explain why, as Dan Rodríguez García (2006) has shown for Senegalese-Spanish couples in Spain, Senegalese men who marry European women tend to be better incorporated into Senegalese communities abroad than are Senegalese women who marry European men. And immigration laws also work against the ideal of companionate marriage that the French state seeks to promote and that many Senegalese women, and some Senegalese men, also want but cannot achieve given current legislation and family pressures. Just as the Danish government did not intend its laws to "force" binational couples into marriage and the British government did not intend for its immigration policies to encourage Pakistani cousin marriage, so too, the French government certainly did not intend for its policies to promote *de facto* polygamy. Ultimately, one may ask what the consequences will be for social morale in European nations when significant numbers of migrants, themselves often future citizens, are pushed into certain practices only to be stigmatized for doing so.

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Notes

- 1 This chapter draws on approximately nine months of fieldwork in France, ongoing fieldwork in the United Kingdom, and two months in Senegal between 2011 and 2013. Research was conducted through semistructured interviews, informal conversations, and volunteer work with *les Amoureux au ban public*, a French civic association providing legal advice to binational couples. Study participants included approximately fifty couples, thirteen of whom were divorced or separated, and equal numbers of francophone African men and women and their French spouses. Individuals ranged in age from their twenties to their eighties. My own identity as the child of a French mother and Senegalese father facilitated access but may also have skewed testimonies toward the more positive aspects of binational marriage. All informant names are pseudonyms, and some biographical details have been changed to preserve anonymity.
- 2 The term *mixed* here refers to binational couples who perceive themselves as such, that is, in which one spouse was raised in Europe and the other in Senegal, as opposed to cases in which the European spouse is a Senegalese migrant who has acquired European citizenship through a previous marriage or several years of residence.
- 3 French law prohibits polygamous marriage, and living in a polygamous arrangement was banned altogether in 1993. Figures are unreliable, but the last official survey, conducted in 1992, estimated that there were about eight thousand polygamous families, involving ninety thousand individuals, living in France (Tribalat, Simon, and Riandey 1996).
- 4 The figures must be approached with caution because they obscure the tendency for people to move in and out of polygamy over the course of their lives (cf. Clignet 1987; Houseman 2009). Surveys only give a snapshot at a particular time and are therefore not entirely accurate ways of measuring polygyny because they do not reflect marital trajectories as a whole (Mondain, Legrand, and Delaunay 2004). In fact, most marriages in Muslim Senegal are monogamous for an average of twelve to fifteen years, after which men may take second wives (Antoine and Nanitelamio 1995; Mondain, Legrand, and Delaunay 2004). A second marriage may lead one of the wives to choose divorce and to herself marry again later, often into a new polygynous arrangement (Dial 2008). Another factor causing bias is that men may tell census surveyors that they have several wives because of the prestige attached to the practice even though they only have one wife at any given time for much of their married lives. In such situations, women are likely to give a similar

response so as not to contradict their husband in front of a stranger.

- 5 This number reflects a decrease from 1993, when 60 percent of Senegalese women over thirty-five were in a polygynous marriage (Ndiaye, Diouf, and Ayad 1994).
- 6 For a much earlier study of transnational polygamy in France, see Fainzang and Journet (1988).
- 7 This observation resonates with Fatou Dial's (2008, 86–87) observation that urban family arrangements have become more complex than in the past because of the unaffordability of housing. Household heads are still assumed to be men, who are understood to have moral authority (*kilifteef*) over household members and dependents (*surga*). In Dakar, however, the lack of formal employment, a high rate of divorce, and male migration mean that household heads are increasingly women. Yet these same women often choose to maintain the illusion of compliance with male authority to protect their reputations and the social networks they facilitate (cf. Bocquier and Nanitelamio 1991; Bop 1996; Buggenhagen 2012; Lecarme 1992).
- 8 For example, one woman now in her midthirties, born of a Senegalese father and a French mother, explained how her mother had found herself in a polygynous situation a couple of years after the whole family had moved to Senegal. Her parents had met in France, where her father had been a student and had worked during the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, he had adopted a French lifestyle, regarded himself as a nonpracticing Muslim, and been committed to monogamy. Not long after the couple moved to Senegal with their three children, however, the husband met a younger Senegalese woman and began sharing his time between his first household and her home. They eventually married in a Muslim ceremony. My interviewee says that her mother knew about the relationship from the beginning and felt as if she had a cowife even before the Muslim marriage took place. She had asked her husband to end the relationship, but he had refused, and she felt that his family's pressure on him to take a second wife worked against her. After sharing her husband for a couple of years, she decided to return to France with the three children. The couple only divorced much later, and, according to my interviewee, her mother never made peace with the way she had felt "pushed out" of the marriage. I was told of other cases in which the arrival of a second Senegalese wife or the discovery that there had been a first wife all along created serious tension within a marriage but did not bring an end to it. In all of these cases, the European women had had children with their Senegalese spouses, and they chose to come to terms with the polygynous situation rather than let the family dissolve altogether. The survival of these marriages in the face of polygyny involved many individual factors, but it seems to have been linked to the place of residence of the different parties: when the two households lived in different countries, the polygynous arrangement was more likely to endure even when both wives knew about each other. When polygynous arrangements involved a European and a Senegalese wife both living in Senegal, however, breakdown of one of the relationships was more likely. This pattern may not be very different from that associated with Senegalese polygynous families, as studies such as Dial's (2008) have shown that polygyny in contemporary urban Senegal is associated with a high rate of divorce.
- 9 Whereas men who meet their European spouses abroad are usually middle class (because migration requires resources), those who meet their European wives in Senegal may be from less-privileged backgrounds. Moreover, in recent years the gender balance has shifted, as rising numbers of Senegalese women now marry European men. Much as anthropologists have noted in other parts of Africa, Senegalese men's declining ability to establish their own households in a context of economic liberalization has made

marriage to European men increasingly attractive to women (Cole 2010; Groes-Green 2013).

- 10 Predictably, women's perspectives often differ: they too increasingly aspire to companionate marriage, but because being married is key to establishing status, many feel that they have little choice but to get married at any cost, even if doing so means becoming a second or third wife. Some of the women on whom a second wife is imposed, as is often the case, choose divorce to get out of unhappy polygamous marriages (Dial 2008).
- 11 Salomon (2009) noted a similar inversion of gender roles in her study of intimate relations between Senegalese men and European women on the coast south of Dakar.
- 12 Different countries have different rules, but there is a general tendency across the European Union to extend the probationary period, with renewal of one-year visas subject to people's ability to demonstrate that they still live together as a couple and have sufficient resources to support themselves. In France, the probationary period was extended from two to four years in 2006.