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Renegotiating Obligations through Migration: Senegalese Transnationalism and the Quest for the *Right* Distance

María Hernández-Carretero

This article explores the interplay between spatial and social distance and financial obligations and goals in the context of migration. On the basis of an ethnographic study of Senegalese migration to Spain, it discusses the idea that distance may be partly sought to gain leverage in renegotiating responses to redistributive demands and responsibilities that come at odds with goals of accumulation and investment. Financial prosperity may be thought easier to attain by temporarily distancing oneself but is also sought to gain a better capacity to assist others. Besides, both accumulation and redistribution contribute to migrants' overall objective of becoming socioeconomically successful and gaining a respectable presence at home. Many migrants do not wish to break with or ostracise dependents and other relations, and expectations of redistribution often grow as a result of migration. Thus, rather than resolve the dilemma between accumulation and redistribution, migration transforms it. Seeking a balance, some migrants devise strategies to establish the right distance, in socially and morally acceptable terms, to retain control over financial priorities without undermining social ties. Too much distance could result in ostracism; too little might stifle or delay ambitions for savings and investments, which are considered a precondition for return.

Keywords: Migrant Transnationalism; Moralities; Remittances; Investment; Return

Introduction

As he navigated the streets of Dakar, an ageing taxi driver from Touba, Senegal's second-largest city, clarified a paradox that had puzzled me for some time. Surprised that most taxi drivers I met were from out of town, I had asked why he preferred to work in the capital city rather than his hometown, where his family stayed. He explained that both demand for taxi drivers and fees for rides were higher in Dakar.

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But, I insisted, were not the higher earnings offset by simultaneously covering household expenditures in two cities? The difference, he explained, was that if he worked nearer to home and was physically present among his family every day, he would have a harder time refusing requests for money, whereas from a distance he had more leeway to manage his earnings.

In this article, I explore how individuals manage social and spatial distance through migration to attain financial prosperity and fulfil interpersonal obligations. The above vignette of a case of internal migration illustrates dynamics also found in international migration: the role played by money in connecting migrants with others back home and migrants' efforts to balance goals of accumulation and investment with collective needs and interpersonal obligations. This reflects a basic tension between accumulation and redistribution that is particularly salient in societies where norms of solidarity and reciprocity dominate: refusing assistance to others is morally and socially objectionable, but the pressure to redistribute personal wealth can interfere with individual prosperity (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Hoff and Sen 2006; Grimm et al. 2013). The literature on entrepreneurship in such settings suggests that migration may be sought to reduce those pressures and accumulate wealth (Hart 1975; Platteau 2009). Bruce Whitehouse's (2011, 2012) research of intra-African migrants shows how distancing oneself brings the double advantage of enabling access to lucrative business activities *and* allowing individuals to filter, prioritise or delay socio-financial commitments.

Building on the notion that migration may resolve the dilemma between redistribution and accumulation, this article explores how this dilemma actually evolves after emigration. I show that migrants who do not break with their home communities continue to negotiate the interplay between spatial and social distance to reconcile personal and investment goals with fulfilling interpersonal obligations. They struggle to establish the *right* distance: enough to be able to save, but not so much that ties with family and friends become jeopardised.

The discussion is based on an ethnographic study of Senegalese migration to Spain that includes views of Senegalese migrants in Spain and non-migrants in Senegal. These combined perspectives provide insight into how the interplay between spatial and social distance is perceived by individuals with different experiences of migration. The case of Senegalese labour migration is particularly relevant because Senegalese migrants are generally motivated by attaining socioeconomic success and supporting their families, and remain socially and emotionally anchored in Senegal, visiting the homeland as frequently as possible and intending to return there eventually (Riccio 2002). Migration offers a way to gain sufficient prosperity to build a stable future and fulfil age- and gender-specific responsibilities and obligations towards one's relations (Mbodji 2008). The wish to return to an improved, honourable status is thus inherent to the intention to emigrate in the first place (Sinatti 2011; Quiminal 1991). Senegalese labour migration to the West is therefore not so much about breaking with conditions and obligations at home to seek a better life abroad, but, Roos Willems (2014) suggests, about profiting from the conditions offered by migration to

selectively satisfy engagements that define social presence and belonging while building personal capital.

While many migrants in the study noted tensions between fulfilling obligations and pursuing long-term accumulation and investment goals, none considered it an option to refrain from the former. Besides the fact that all had close relatives in Senegal—parents, spouses, siblings and children—and other relations to whom they felt socially close and financially obliged, continued participation in webs of responsibility and obligation beyond the immediate family appeared central to their sense of identity and belonging to their home community. Most expressed the desire to eventually settle down in Senegal, cared about building a socially respected status there and were committed to moral norms of reciprocity and wealth sharing. As Bruno Riccio (2001, 593) has noted, Senegalese migrants display an ‘individual and entrepreneurial feature’ that ‘coexists with and is even embedded within the more visible communitarian and collectivist code of social solidarity’. For many, achieving prosperity is itself sought to gain a better capacity to honour responsibilities and obligations. Moreover, wealth accumulation only becomes socially significant as a status gain through the group’s recognition, which is at least partly dependent on compliance with norms of solidarity and redistribution (Blanchard 2011, 149). In sum, both accumulation and redistribution contribute to migrants’ goals of gaining recognition and continuing to belong back home (see also Buggenhagen 2012).

Following a brief methodological discussion, I describe the relationship between money and interpersonal obligations in Senegalese society and discuss how migration is imagined as a way to balance obligations with financial accumulation and achieve prosperity. I then analyse how migrants negotiate the dilemma between accumulation and redistribution: new opportunities and challenges emerge, since expectations of redistribution in fact grow in anticipation of the wealth that migrants may earn abroad. I show how migrants’ negotiation of the interplay between spatial and social distance influences transnational behaviour and migration trajectories, including remittance sending, return visits, ties with non-migrants and considerations about return. I argue that the distance created through migration and the concomitant structural barriers to communication generate a new moral landscape for the conciliation of interpersonal obligations.

Method

The empirical data on which this article is based were collected through multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Spain and Senegal between the spring of 2010 and fall of 2012 and consist of semi-structured interviews and notes from semi-participant observation. This multi-sited approach provided access to both migrants’ and non-migrants’ views, an appreciation of origin and destination contexts, and an overall understanding of both groups’ ideas and experience of migration and transnationalism. I conducted interviews with about 50 people, roughly half of them migrants including a few returnees. The total number of people with whom I interacted during

fieldwork was, however, much larger. Insights from informal interactions were recorded in the fieldnotes that complement the interview material. Migrant interviewees were aged from their early 20s to 60s and were almost exclusively male, reflecting the overwhelmingly male and young Senegalese population in Spain. Non-migrants in Senegal were a more diverse group comprised of women and men of a wide range of ages and with varying social proximity to one or more migrants. Most informants were ethnic Wolof or spoke Wolof, and fieldwork interaction, including interviews, took place in Spanish, French and Wolof.

Throughout the article I refer to ‘migrants’ and ‘non-migrants’. I recognise the existence of internal differences within these categories and the relevance of other social markers but emphasise these specific terms to highlight theoretically interesting transnational interactions that are affected by one’s positioning with respect to them (cf. Carling 2008). These categories are, moreover, well established within Senegalese society, where being a migrant or not and having migrant relatives or not is often presumed to imply certain social status or access to wealth.

The fieldwork was carried out in a cluster of localities in Catalonia, Spain and in a rural community in central Senegal. The Spanish fieldsite was a primary destination for migrants from the Senegalese fieldsite. Migrants from across Senegal work in the area in a variety of sectors, including commerce, hospitality, agriculture and construction. The main economic activities in the Senegalese fieldsite were agriculture and commerce, though it has become common for young rural men to seek work in Senegalese cities (see Bass and Sow 2006). A considerable number have also left the community for Spain, Italy and some African destinations.

Money and Obligations in Senegalese Society

Fulfilling age- and gender-specific roles to one’s family and community in Senegal requires meeting interpersonal responsibilities and obligations in which money plays an important part. These include providing for one’s household, engaging in reciprocal exchanges, helping those in need and making social payments (money and gifts given through particular social relationships or ceremonies).

Families in Senegal are extended, patrilocal and traditionally structured around the principles of hierarchy and communitarism (Diop 2012).¹ Polygyny is common, and households are often very large, especially in rural areas. Sharing lies at the core of Senegalese family relations, which is reflected in the very terminology of kinship: the Wolof term for blood relations and kinship, *mbokk*, derives from the term *bokk*, meaning to share or have in common (Sinatti 2014, 219). As heads of household, husbands are financially responsible for their families. Women, though they often engage in economic activities, are not obliged to contribute their earnings to the family budget (Babou 2008, 11–12). As a result, an entire family’s finances are often covered from a single salary, supplemented with proceeds from other household members’ small informal economic activities or with financial assistance from the family’s social network. Being a head of household represents significant responsibility and pressure

but is also a great source of pride, authority and respectability for men—all of which may be challenged if those responsibilities are not adequately fulfilled (see Buggenhagen 2012; Hernández-Carretero and Carling 2012). ‘A man’s worth’, Cheikh Babou (2008, 11) writes, ‘is measured by the value of the house he can build, the quality of life he is able to provide to his wife or wives and children, and his ability to materially support his parents and in-laws’.

Traditionally, when the head of household retires his responsibilities are transferred to a younger brother or his oldest son. This puts pressure on first-borns to prosper so that they will eventually be able to fulfil the associated financial responsibilities. For younger, unmarried men, achieving the necessary financial independence to establish their own household is a necessary step to social adulthood. Pape,² one of the migrants I met in Spain, stressed the role of money in assigning authority and ordering social hierarchies within families and how this relates to migration aspirations. Intra-familial conflicts erupt, he explained, when insolvency upsets traditional hierarchies of age and elder sons see their authority denied and their opinion ignored. The desire to be respected drives many to migrate abroad in search of wealth that may restore their position:

If there’s an opinion to be given in the family, the one with money is addressed, even if he’s the youngest [...] because he’s the one who can fix the situation! Another one may be the oldest, but he’s got nothing. He who has nothing will get mad with the family, because he’s not given the authority he should as the eldest. He’s ignored in favour of the youngest, because that’s the one with the money. [...] You, who have nothing to put on the table, you wait. They’ll consult you later. Sometimes, they forget about you. [...] That’s why we struggle! Why we sacrifice everything to come to Europe, in search of capital...! To be king over there, when we return! [...] To fix the problems, and not be ignored, undermined.

Beyond household responsibilities, obligations towards extended family and community members create and solidify ties of sociality and mutual assistance. Systematic gift relationships help uphold institutionalised kinship ties and solidarity between distant kin (Sylla [1978] 1994, 126). Moral and social imperatives prescribe the sharing of wealth through social payments, mutual aid, assistance to kin or kith in need, gestures of hospitality towards guests, or gift giving. Expectations of wealthy individuals are particularly high. Wealth sharing and benevolence build moral and social status.

While material wealth brings security in the short term, its redistribution through social obligations and reciprocal exchange assures long-term stability, social status and belonging. Money transferred through social interactions serves to cement social ties, build and uphold social networks and individual and family prestige, and ensure future financial security through the establishment of reciprocal ties to which one may turn for assistance in unfavourable times (Buggenhagen 2012). ‘Like money’, Bass and Sow (2006, 99) write, ‘social relationships are a valuable resource and have worth that can be called on’. Social obligations and personal prosperity are thus closely interconnected: in

striving to honour obligations and accumulate material wealth, individuals seek both security and respectability in their communities.

This relates to a broader dilemma between accumulation and redistribution that is common in contexts where collective interests are given primacy over individual ones and one person is in charge of a large network of dependents. In a study of entrepreneurs in Ghana, Keith Hart (1975, 28) referred to this as the ‘entrepreneur’s dilemma’ over ‘how to divide his resources between a public social security fund of reciprocal exchanges between familiars and private accumulation towards a personalized form of security provided by capital investments’. As Hart points out, accumulation and redistribution are competing sources of security. While redistribution to reciprocity networks may contribute to solidifying the individual’s status in the long term, it curtails short-term accumulation for investment. The entrepreneur’s dilemma highlights the embeddedness of economic processes in social interactions from which they cannot be fully disengaged (Polanyi [1944] 2001; Granovetter 1985). Such embeddedness may adversely affect private entrepreneurship if redistributive norms provoking ‘excessive’ claims on the gains of successful members challenge accumulation and discourage entrepreneurial initiative (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Hart 1975; Granovetter 1995; Platteau 2009).

In such contexts, migration may be sought as a way to gain greater control over one’s wealth. By moving away from one’s community and partly disentangling from webs of solidarity, one makes personal wealth less available to demands and obligations with the hope of facilitating the pursuit of individual goals or entrepreneurial objectives (see Willems 2014). Hart (1975) indeed found that most entrepreneurs sought to isolate themselves at the initial stages of accumulation. Other research in African migration has shown how migration provides a way to address this dilemma without utterly refusing to help one’s needy kin and kith (Jónsson 2008; Whitehouse 2012). Other strategies include joining a group with different norms regarding self-enrichment (Whitehouse 2012, 81–82); concealing one’s wealth, for instance, by taking up unnecessary loans to signal inability to respond to financial requests (Baland, Guirkinger, and Mali 2011); or transforming wealth into forms less accessible than cash (such as jewellery or livestock), making it easier to refuse sharing without appearing antisocial (Shipton 1995).

Migration and Distance as a Path to Prosperity in Senegal

Unemployment, underemployment and unsatisfactory working conditions in Senegal are particularly challenging for youth. Faced with limited opportunities for well-remunerated employment and extensive interpersonal responsibilities and obligations, many young men struggle to support themselves or overcome day-to-day subsistence.

With the decay of agriculture and manufacturing, in recent decades increasing numbers have turned to commerce and international migration in search of opportunities (Buggenhagen 2012; Diouf 1992). ‘What we need in Senegal is to take off’, said Mor, describing how migration comes to be seen as a way forward:

One person works for quite a few people, for many relatives who need help. You also work to help friends, you work to help neighbours, and that doesn't allow you to progress as... as one normally should. Right? So you reach a moment where what you earn isn't enough to help yourself and your family, to have a normal life [...] You have so many expenses, and at some point, you consider going somewhere else.

Migrating to work in richer countries is considered a promising path for gathering the means to establish and sustain one's family, build a house and secure one's future through investment. Numerous migrants and non-migrants spoke of migration as the means to a *départ* (start-up capital) for business activity in Senegal, where entrepreneurs struggle to secure funds and complain that commercial loans are difficult to obtain (Galand 1994). Private relations, too, are sometimes more willing to finance international migration, which they consider more promising than business ventures in Senegal. This is not to say that all migrants are, or intend to become, entrepreneurs, or that my analysis focused solely on those who were. Successful businesses are expected to provide a good living, but the salience of entrepreneurship is inevitably related to structural constraints that result in a high prevalence of self-employment. With limited opportunities in the formal sector, employment largely hinges on individual entrepreneurship. Migration may be seen as a way to accumulate capital to improve existing business activities, such as modernising an agricultural operation or expanding a shop, or establish new ones. This partly coincides with the New Economics of Labour Migration understanding of migration as a way of overcoming local capital-market constraints (Katz and Stark 1986).

Investments in Senegal are, besides, generally considered a precondition to return, since migrants typically intend to be self-employed after settling back home (Sinatti 2011; Bruzzone et al. 2006). This means that concern over pursuing income-generating investments and balancing them with redistributive goals may only emerge once a migrant begins to consider a specific plan for return. In recent years, the Senegalese Government itself has strived to promote migration aimed at resource accumulation towards investment in Senegal (Sinatti 2015). As international migration stimulates asset acquisition, international migrants gain investment capacity with respect to non-migrants in Senegal (Mezger Kveder and Beauchemin 2014).

In addition to providing access to greater earnings, migration was also regarded by some as an opportunity to renegotiate financially demanding social obligations that constrain individual management of wealth, but which one may be unable and unwilling to break with. Informants explained that the degrees of spatial proximity and limitations to mobility and communication imposed by migration affect the relationship between interpersonal obligations and accumulation. Both migrants and non-migrants noted that, while certain financial requests or obligations are impossible to refuse in person, spatial distance alters opportunities for interpersonal interaction, such as day-to-day encounters, visits, hosting guests or attendance at ceremonies, where gifts are given and financial requests may be made. Some illustrated this by comparing internal and international migration: internal migrants

visit home more frequently and are expected to attend family ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms and funerals—incurring costs in transportation, gifts and forgone salary. Still, they attend fewer ceremonies than they would if they lived in the village and are shielded from nonessential day-to-day purchases that arise when living within one's family. International migrants are even less accessible and therefore able to retain greater control over their money. A woman explained that when preparing a family ceremony in the village, she could send someone to demand the financial contribution of a relative working in Dakar who is ignoring her requests, but would be unable to do the same with relatives working abroad. The greater distance and barriers to mobility shield international migrants from the more effective face-to-face request (Cliggett 2005; Carling 2014).

International migrants do continue to support their households, assist others and contribute to ceremonies from abroad, but many non-migrants claimed that they gain greater leverage in managing the use of their earnings. They suggested that this is because migrants can better control the frequency and extent of their financial contributions by remitting a single monthly allocation to their relatives, instead of responding to requests as they arise. They can justify doing this on the basis of the rhythm of salary payments in Europe and the costs of wiring money. Phone-to-phone credit transfers, non-migrants mentioned as an example, could be asked of someone within Senegal but not someone abroad. Tapha, a migrant himself, said that in Senegal 'you cannot hide for a while to save some money'. Having worked in a neighbouring country before migrating to Spain, he insisted on the importance of relative geographic distance, reflecting over how, even though his initial destination offered good economic opportunities, he had difficulty saving because his proximity to Senegal meant he returned frequently to attend his relatives' needs:

Going farther away is helping oneself to save. Because being at home there are always more expenses. [...] If you're away, then at least those who are at home try to do something, make an effort to [make ends meet]. But when you arrive, then... they think you have something to help them, right? [...] They tell you about all the problems they have, all the debts they have. [...] And then you have to do something about it. [...] When you're farther away [...] there are things they can't ask for, you know? They ask only for the important things [...] when they don't have money to pay a medical prescription or they are sick and need to go to the doctor, all of that. Important things. The rest, they don't ask for.

Some migration literature has indeed shown that spatial distance alters both possibilities to request assistance and the giver's ability to leverage their response to requests (Whitehouse 2012; Jónsson 2008; Cliggett 2005; Carling 2014; Hart 1975; Platteau 2009). 'Distance', Whitehouse (2012, 82) writes, 'has the effect of filtering out all but the most urgent requests' and provides migrants 'more leeway to ignore [requests] or postpone replying than they would back home', partly because of imperfect information on migrants' economic activities and earnings. This, he shows, facilitates initiating entrepreneurial projects. Lisa Cliggett (2005, 144) tells of urban

migrants who are 'saved by distance' from requests from poor fellow villagers and left with more room to handle their own finances and save for private needs.

I next show how the tension between accumulation and redistribution is, however, not entirely resolved by migration. New challenges arise, since migrants remain determined to preserve ties that require financial commitment, continue to receive requests for assistance and are typically expected to be wealthier and therefore have a greater capacity to help.

Negotiating Distance as a Migrant

While physically absent, migrants remain socially present through transnational interactions with others back home and may be better capable of fulfilling their social roles than if they had stayed put. I next discuss how migrants strive to negotiate the *right* spatial and social distance: enough to grasp the financial benefits of distancing and pave the way to return without breaking off with relations in Senegal. Transnational commitments shape migrants' lives, the strategies they devise to establish the *right* distance, the challenges they face and the moral dimensions of these efforts.

Continued Commitments and new Expectations

Whether or not migrants' ability to renegotiate financial commitments and save actually improves after migration is influenced both by their continued commitment to interpersonal obligations across transnational space and non-migrants' (new) expectations. As explained above, Senegalese migrants generally intend to enhance their social presence back home rather than to start anew abroad. They remit money to support their households, stay in close contact with relations and provide assistance to others when possible. Distancing is sought to boost financial capacity and expected to facilitate the balance of obligations with private goals—not to escape obligations altogether. This challenges Jean-Philippe Platteau's (2009, 681) claim that entrepreneurial individuals may not only 'choose to move a comfortable distance from their kith and kin', but may 'also need to sever their ties with relatives, neighbours, and friends so as to prevent them from settling in their new home and drawing on their incomes' and 'will seldom return to their native area to evade customary rules of greeting and extended family pressures for showing generosity and compassion'.

Since migration in Senegal is generally aimed at improving one's family's conditions, there is a strong normative attitude that migrants should not forget the plight of those who stay behind and their cultural and moral roots. Migrants are often reminded by those back home and fellow migrants to stay in touch with and assist relations in Senegal. These reminders are considered necessary to counter the temptation to spend one's earnings abroad. The way money earned through migration is used thus becomes constitutive of the social ties binding migrants and their close ones across transnational space, transforming the social distance between them.

Despite expectations that migration may ease the dilemma between accumulation and redistribution, migrants in fact typically feel they are more financially solicited

than others back home. They attribute this imbalance to non-migrants associating migration to the West with enrichment and therefore making exaggerated assumptions of migrants' affluence and ability to assist others. This may provoke frustration among migrants who feel misperceived and complain, as Alpha did, that the extensive requests that result from the mismatch between their assumed and actual wealth hamper their ability to save:

They make requests to me, who comes from Europe. Because they think that I've come with plenty of money, that I have *plenty* of money, that I have more than my brother, because he's in Senegal and I'm abroad. This is also something that leads to migrants not managing to accomplish certain things. The family circle doesn't leave you alone with your savings.

Alpha's words illustrate the fragile balance between accumulation and redistribution and challenge the perception that distance inevitably facilitates saving. Other migrants and refugees similarly find themselves unprepared for the load of expectations placed on them once abroad, frustrated by the celerity with which their earnings vanish in responding to requests, and seeking to renegotiate obligations without actually defaulting on them (Akuei 2005; Gamburd 2004; Mohan 2006). Still, exaggerated assumptions of migrants' wealth are at least partly fostered by migrants' own redistributive efforts and material displays of success, such as house construction (Fouquet 2007; Melly 2010).

While international migrants are screened to some extent by distance from expenses related to social payments at ceremonies they do not attend in Senegal, they still contribute, often lavishly, to many events that take place in their absence. They fund ceremonies that affect them directly—such as their children's naming—and are often requested to assist in financing celebrations and ritual payments—such as bridewealth—on behalf of relatives, or to contribute to preparations for religious holidays, such as buying sheep or clothing for Tabaski (*Eid al-Adha*). Money sent home may also end as gifts in ceremonies that migrants' wives and mothers attend. A survey in Dakar and Touba found that as much as 22% of international remittances received by households were destined to fund expenses related to religious and family ceremonies (Ndione and Lalou 2005, 13). Migrants are also expected to be generous during return visits by bringing gifts, hosting guests and assisting those in need.

Modern information and communications technologies allow an unprecedented level of connectivity between migrants abroad and non-migrants back home, facilitating communication, money transfers and requests to assist or contribute to collective needs from afar (Lindley 2009; Tazanu 2012; Dia 2007). Gossip of unfulfilled redistributive expectations transmitted through transnational networks can also generate social pressure on migrants' remitting behaviour (Drotbohm 2010; Lindley 2009). The effect of transnational reminders and gossip may thus offset some benefits of distancing for leveraging the balance between earnings, obligations and accumulation.

Morally Acceptable Distancing

Ideally, distancing offers financially, socially and morally promising outcomes. The moral acceptability of the reorganisation of financial commitments is crucial to migrants who seek distance as a necessary step to reach an otherwise unattainable capacity to assist relations back home. As a trader in Senegal, Pape had felt compelled to help those in need yet feared his benevolence might eventually impoverish him. He sought migration—distancing himself from prospective debtors—as a temporary release from the moral imperative to assist:

You see, in the retail trade in Senegal, you lend out on credit, and those credits are never returned! [...] And you, the small trader who wants to succeed and progress, who gives out credits to poor people... one day, you will end up like them! And then, sometimes you think that, 'I can't succeed here. I have to get out of this country. Because, on this path, I can't make it. Because I'm surrounded by poor people, who have nothing!' And if you have something more than them, they won't leave you alone. Every day they ask you, and you can't refuse, because you're part of them. So, the best solution is to get out for a little while, out of their sight. Then, you can organize yourself, achieve something, which can return towards them [...] and can fix some problems, not all, but some problems.

Pape's strategy highlights two moral dimensions implicit in distancing as a way to pursue accumulation without breaking with communal norms of mutual help and redistribution. One is that the effects of distance dampen, or *displace*, some of the *moral responsibility* for prioritising among obligations. Migrants' possibilities for making their money available transnationally are influenced not only by their willingness or generosity, but also by the logistical aspects—accessibility, cost—of cross-border communication and money transfers that affect their ability to share their money. Less accessible for requests and limited in their possibilities to redistribute, they may then focus on essential expenses while filtering away others whose in-person refusal may have borne a social cost. This shift in responsibility from the migrant to the migration infrastructure alters the moral acceptability of forms of financial allocation that may counter norms of collective solidarity, allowing migrants to accumulate wealth in a socially and morally acceptable manner. This resonates with Michele Gamburd's (2004) account of Sri Lankan female migrants' discursive strategies: claiming that the foreign money 'burns', they transfer responsibility for the moral acceptability of its uses to the money itself. This enables them to favour saving and investments, which benefits nuclear families but undermines insurance networks maintained through redistribution and reciprocity with distant kin.

The second moral dimension emerging from Pape's words is that the intention behind distancing is not to escape, but to *delay redistribution*. Under this temporal reorientation, the entrepreneur's dilemma appears less as a clash between accumulation and redistribution than, as Hart (1975, 11) points out, between accumulation and short-term consumption: benefits derived from investments made at the expense of short-term consumption may be collectively redistributed in the long term.

Finding the Right Distance in Transnational Interactions

Given the extensive, enduring and oftentimes urgent nature of interpersonal obligations, even after having distanced themselves from their communities migrants continue to struggle to simultaneously fulfil both goals of redistribution and saving. They thus devise strategies to find the *right* distance in order to balance social proximity to others back home with control over money. Distance is negotiated through many aspects of transnational interaction, including staying in touch, responding to financial requests, sending remittances, investing in Senegal, considering family reunification and returning to visit.

Migrants in charge of households in Senegal may *send a fixed monthly contribution*, which includes set amounts for regular expenses and ‘pocket’ money for particular relations, such as parents and wives. Families are expected to manage with the monthly allowance, pacing their needs to the size and frequency of its reception and occasionally borrowing from their social network to cover extraordinary expenses before the next remittance. Both migrants and relatives of migrants in Senegal acknowledged that this sometimes means that minor requests—for replacing a broken tool, a new hairdo or a treat for the children—become filtered away by distance. Migrants nevertheless make additional transfers under extraordinary circumstances of necessity and, as mentioned above, often feel that they are more solicited than non-migrants.

When the pressure and desire to assist others in Senegal become overwhelming, some migrants choose to *limit their contact* with non-migrants or *delay their responses to requests*. Restricting access to one’s contact information abroad or screening calls from Senegal eases the moral quandary of feeling obliged to honour requests one would prefer to avoid and the social cost of refusing them. ‘Few people in Senegal have my European phone number’, Adama conceded. He explained that, though requests to assist with daily expenses or preparations for ceremonies are numerous, in isolation they are affordable and therefore difficult to refuse. Preferring to keep money for off-work periods, however, he minimises the inflow of requests. This allows him to preserve his savings and avoid having to refuse requests.

Delaying one’s response represents another strategy when a request conflicts with one’s own financial needs, though as Pape illustrated this may end in avoidance:

You negotiate with him: ‘Well, I don’t have it right now, but, let’s see ... over the week, or by the end of the month, if I have it, I’ll call you’. At the end of the month, you don’t have it, and you don’t call him. Sometimes he calls you back. You see the number, you don’t know what to tell him! You ... don’t answer the call. Because you have nothing to tell him, and you don’t want to say no.

While refusals can erode social ties between migrants and non-migrants, delaying allows migrants to keep control over their money—or avoid admitting their inability to help during difficult periods—while expressing commitment to interpersonal obligations. Non-migrants can be sensitive to unanswered calls though, interpreting

them (sometimes correctly) as migrants' reluctance to answer for fear of being asked for money. Too much avoidance can therefore also alienate relations.

Another strategy to negotiate distance and balance redistribution and accumulation is *establishing businesses in Senegal* to ease dependence on remittances and improve the family's long-term livelihood by generating a source of income for relatives. As Lat's account shows, however, this process is not easy:

I've tried to open a store, but by now I'm at my third shopkeeper. [...] It seems to me they don't understand that this is a business. That this has to generate a profit, and we'll all share the profit. They don't see it that way. They think that this is a business, it generates profits, but they should keep more than half of the profits it generates to themselves. That's their mind-set. They think that you're here making money, so, oh well, what [the business] generates is nothing compared to what you earn here. So, generally, they [go] 'Ah, this ... I'll just eat [take] it.'

Migrants often tell of investment ventures that failed to prosper due to mismanagement or breach of trust. They blame non-migrants, often relatives, who, lacking business skills or bearing unrealistic ideas of the extent of a migrant's wealth, divert profits or mismanage the business in the migrant's absence. In some cases, failure to find a trustworthy supervisor results in migrants choosing to manage their investments themselves during visits to Senegal (Bruzzone et al. 2006, 25). This relates to the broader issue of transnational information asymmetries and conflicts over the intended purpose of remitted money and migrants' ability to control it (Carling 2008). Migrants might, however, not always be able or wishing to determine the final use of remittances, given that they are not only financial but also social transactions expressing care, gratitude or obligation (Hammond 2010).

The effect of migrants' efforts to balance accumulation and redistribution on social distance is also evident in their attitudes to *transnational family arrangements*, specifically family reunification. Most Senegal-born migrants in Spain are working-age men whose families live in Senegal. This pattern responds both to structural constraints to family reunification and migrants' personal choices to reconcile family responsibilities with goals of accumulation and return to Senegal. Some migrants who are able to bring some of their closest relatives to Europe do so, while others prefer to migrate alone. Baizán, Beauchemin, and González-Ferrer (2014) find that couple reunification among Senegalese migrants in Europe is relatively uncommon.

Explaining his preference to join his wife back in Senegal rather than have her join him, Alassane said: 'Some bring their wives here because they think they're going to stay. But me, I don't intend to stay here'. Like Alassane, many see family reunification as running contrary to their vision of migration as a temporary stage of their lives, since bringing a spouse and/or children would increase their living costs and decrease the flexibility in work and living conditions in Europe that facilitate saving towards investment and return. Male migrants in Spain typically live thriftily, sharing housing and meals, and, without dependents, are able to be as geographically mobile as employment opportunities require (see van Nieuwenhuyze 2009). Bringing dependents

to Spain would curtail the advantages of that mobility and increase expenses in Europe without putting an end to financial responsibilities in Senegal, where additional relatives would remain. Family reunification was thus often described as being at odds with saving, assisting one's wider network and investing in projects in Senegal that enhance social status and belonging and facilitate return.

Return visits are occasions for migrants to reinforce proximity in their bonds with non-migrants in their place of origin, to reassert their status and belonging in those communities and to explore or promote business interests or build houses. In Senegal, people spoke about how the village 'comes to life' during the period when migrants visit. Migrants' cash activates the local economy. Large meals are prepared to celebrate their visit, women and children get new clothes made for the occasion, and migrants distribute *sarica* (gifts from travels) to relatives, friends and neighbours. During their stay, migrants visit and host others. During these occasions they make cash gifts and may be asked for financial assistance. As Alpha explained:

The moment people know that you've arrived, in general, there are people, relatives, who leave their village to come [visit you]. They know that Alpha has come back from Spain. They come ... to ask for some help. In your neighbourhood, someone may send their child, or come themselves, to show you a medical prescription they cannot buy ... So you'll give them what you can. Others say 'Ah, my dear, if you don't help me pay the electricity bill this month, for sure in some days they'll cut it'. There are things like that. Since you came from Europe, they say that you came with money. So if they have problems, the first person they'll call upon is you.

Migrants' reputation and their social distance to non-migrants are affected by how expectations are met during return visits. Expectations of gifts and other 'proof' of financial success abroad are at their highest on migrants' first return visit. A migrant who fails to give *sarica* or gives too little could be cast as mean or stingy, and someone whose request has been turned down is unlikely to come back to them for assistance. Migrants often find it difficult to refuse requests for *sarica* or help, either because they do not want to 'shatter others' hopes' or because they fear tarnishing their own reputation by being cast as selfish or unsuccessful.

Migrants are aware that mobilising money to provide gifts or solve family problems is closely tied with social prestige and relevance, and may feel that the impression they give during the short period of their visit is crucial. As a result, some are nervous about going back if they cannot afford the high cost of engaging in these flows of gifts and assistance. Mbaye told of a friend who had gone for holidays in Senegal with very little pocket money:

He'll have a holiday, but a very bad holiday. Yes, because everyone, everyone thinks that he's coming with lots of money. [...] Later, he'll be in trouble. Because if someone asks him for money, and he's not able to give it to him, that will bring him shame. [...] This also breaks a *lot* of relationships with people, because if someone asks for something, and you say 'I don't have it, this year I've only come to see my family, but I didn't bring any money', they will not accept him!

This story illustrates how the pressure that hovers over return visits influences social distance and the quality of interpersonal interactions. It can also affect the frequency or duration of potential visits.

Given the high cost of visits, some migrants delay visits or reduce their frequency in order to prioritise other financial objectives or to avoid the shame and loss of face that could ensue from disappointing the expectations of those at home. Boris Nieswand (2011) has similarly described how some Ghanaian migrants in Germany preferred to delay visits to Ghana rather than go back empty-handed. Delaying visits might backfire, however, since prolonging one's stay in Europe might only increase non-migrants' expectations of how much money one has had the time to accumulate abroad and be ready to display and redistribute when going back to visit. In sum, return visits represent sensitive moments in migrants' struggle to balance accumulation and redistribution in socially and morally acceptable ways (cf. Osella and Osella 2000).

Seeking the *right* distance carries not only financial but also social trade-offs, as the strategies migrants devise may have opposite effects on different kinds of social ties. Family reunification may benefit spousal relations but further distance the migrant from others he can no longer afford to help. Reducing the frequency of return visits may prevent straining ties with those who are disappointed by what the migrant brings back, but at the cost of reducing contact with relatives.

Compromises and Prolonged Trajectories

The difficulty of balancing accumulation and transnational engagements may eventually impact migrants' ability to put an end to their time abroad. Several migrants said they had not originally anticipated their migration career to become as long as it had, and they identified obligations to kin and kith back home as a determining factor. Diligently answering requests for assistance or making frequent, expensive visits back home helps reinforce social ties but may delay migrants' progress on other financial fronts. Lat highlighted how the moral imperative to assist his extensive network of kin delays his ability to save and return:

If it was just about me, I would be rich. Right now, I wouldn't need to be here. [...] If everything I've earned here was only going to solving the needs of my family, that is, my wife and children, then, I would no longer ... I would have enough, right? The thing is, you've earned money here, but that money, you haven't treasured it, you haven't kept it. Because, on that side of the family over there, there were people who were in need. So you give them money, you help them. That means, for instance, that you don't keep a lot of money to be able to start something up. [...] the Senegalese family is like that, it's very large. That too implies that we can't ... progress at the speed that we would wish to.

Lat's words show how seeking a balance between accumulation and redistribution ties to the broader perspective of migrants' trajectories: concentrating one's financial efforts in fulfilling interpersonal obligations in the short term solidifies social bonds

and solidarity networks, but it may delay long-term investment projects that facilitate return (Moreno Maestro 2006; Sinatti 2011, 2009; Bruzzone et al. 2006).

Migrants' considerations about return illustrate the tensions between individual and collective interests, saving and consumption, and ultimately the impact of those tensions on individual migrants' trajectories. Moussa explained his prolonged migration and inability to save saying he could not keep money for future needs or projects that could instead solve a relative's urgent need. 'Someone like me cannot save', he said, stressing the moral undertones of the dilemma between accumulation and redistribution. While some migrants said saving was not hindered by helping others because requests generally never exceeded a fraction of their salaries, Moussa suggested an irreconcilable contest between virtuous sharing and self-serving accumulation. Migrants' ability to negotiate obligations and balance socio-financial priorities is influenced by their circumstances (salary, number of dependents) and their social and moral considerations. The outcome of these balancing efforts ultimately affects savings, investments and the perceived ability to return. Overwhelmed by the extensive and pressing nature of transnational obligations, some find themselves unable to promote investments at home, which most consider essential to ensure a sustainable return.

Conclusion

Migration alone does not resolve the dilemma between accumulation and distribution: migrants who retain ties to their home communities and remain committed to supporting their families continue to face extensive obligations and often increased expectations of redistribution once abroad. Seeking a way to reconcile their commitment to interpersonal obligations with other financial objectives, some devise strategies to establish the *right* social and spatial distance that may allow them to make room for savings and investment without alienating relations back home. Migrants' pursuit of this balance involves a constant negotiation of obligations through their transnational engagements: fixing remittances, limiting contact to reduce incoming requests or adapting the rhythm of return visits to balance social and financial priorities. These negotiation processes shape transnational social ties and migrants' ability to save and invest back home. The outcome of these balancing efforts ultimately affects migrants' ability to ensure and time a prosperous permanent return, and consequently their migration trajectories.

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Notes

- [1] This is a description of the traditional family structure among the Wolof, the largest ethnic group in Senegal and predominant among the study group.
- [2] All names of informants are pseudonyms.

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