Mobility, social reproduction and triple minority status: young Senegalese-Americans' experiences of growing up transnationally

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A growing body of literature explores how transnational migration from Africa to Western countries affects childrearing practices. While the motivations and constraints underpinning parents' decisions to raise children partly or entirely in the 'homeland' are fairly well documented, much less is known about young people's experiences of transnational mobility and about its relationship to social reproduction. Drawing on data collected over 14 months among Senegalese migrant communities in New York and New Jersey, and in Islamic schools receiving migrants' children in Dakar, Senegal, this paper explores how educational stints in the 'homeland' equip young people with cultural and religious resources to deal with the challenges of living in the US as part of a triple minority as Blacks, immigrants, and Muslims. At the same time, homeland stays produce a series of new vulnerabilities, as young people struggle to adjust to an unfamiliar language and disciplinary regime in the US.

Keywords: Transnational families, social reproduction, West Africa, transnational migration, Islamic education

Introduction

Fatou's small flat in a five-storey Harlem apartment block is always lively with people.[1] The first time I visit, her two-year-old, an energetic little boy, keeps racing through the living room. Fatou sighs that he is turning the flat upside down! Senegal has gotten him too used to having space to run – and she bets her relatives spoiled him rotten! That is what you get in return for sending them to visit, she laments. Fatou's 16-year-old stepdaughter has also just arrived from

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[1] I changed the names of research participants to protect their identities.

Senegal, but for her this is the first time in the US. Fatou seeks advice on which school best to enrol the girl in, given that her English is still weak? A friend passing by for an afternoon visit has a sobering story to share on this topic: After being bullied for her poor English, her teenage daughter pleaded so much to be allowed back to Senegal that she eventually gave in – after barely two years in the US, the girl returned to Senegal.[2]

Pitiful stories about the pitfalls of raising children transnationally are numerous and they circulate widely within the Senegalese community in New York. Even if they do not represent the sum total of experiences – some young people move very successfully between countries – these stories highlight that decisions about the 'right' strategy for securing a good future for one's children are fraught with uncertainty, resulting in significant levels of anxiety among parents. This paper sheds light on these childrearing decisions and their consequences, paying particular attention to young people's experiences of their transnational mobility.

Drawing on data collected over a total of 14 months among Senegalese migrant communities in New York and New Jersey, and in Islamic schools receiving migrants' children in Dakar, Senegal, the paper explores how educational stints in the 'homeland' are experienced by young Senegalese-Americans. I argue that to some extent, such stays/visits equip young people with cultural and religious resources to deal with the challenges of living in the US as part of a triple minority as Blacks, immigrants, and Muslims. At the same time, homeland stays risk perpetuating the class disadvantage young Senegalese-Americans face in the US as they produce a series of new vulnerabilities. When young people arrive in, or return to the US after time spent in Senegal, they often struggle to adjust to an unfamiliar language, social environment and disciplinary regime, which presents potential obstacles for their educational trajectories.

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[2] Fieldnotes, 2017.

Transnational mobility and social reproduction

A growing body of literature explores today how transnational migration from Africa to Western countries affects childrearing practices. Several authors document parents' decisions to raise children partly or entirely in the 'homeland'. Parents make this decision for example to inculcate specific forms of cultural and religious capital (see Coe & Shani, 2015; Hoechner, 2017b), or to protect offspring from the morally 'corrupting' or outright physically dangerous influences of Western society (see Bledsoe & Sow, 2011; Kea & Maier, 2017; Timera, 2002). Parents also send children 'back'[3] to prevent school failure (see Dia, 2016 on children sent from France to Senegal), to 'discipline' wayward teenagers (see Tiilikainen, 2011 on Somali youth sent "back" to Somaliland), and to free up their own time to work (see Coe, 2014 on Ghanaian migrants in the US; see Grysole, 2018 on Senegalese migrants in the US and Italy).

The motivations and constraints underpinning parents' decisions to educate children partly or entirely in the 'homeland' are thus fairly well documented. Yet, much less is known about how such transnational forms of youth mobility actually work out, what risks and promises they bear for 'saving' young people's future, and how they are experienced by the young people in question. Scholars working within the framework of 'segmented assimilation' (Portes & Zhou, 1993) have paid some attention to the role attachments to the social and cultural norms of the 'homeland' play for the social mobility of migrants' children in the US. A central tenet here has been that migrants' children who preserve strong links with the culture of their 'homeland' are likely to experience greater social mobility than those who 'assimilate' (see e.g. Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Waters, 1999). This is largely because the children of non-white immigrants are unlikely to 'gain […] access to middle-class white

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[3] Being sent 'back' can mean for some children going to a country they have never been to and that they know only indirectly from their parents' tales, or phone calls with relatives there.

society, no matter how acculturated they become,' suggesting that 'assimilation' usually means assimilation into the underclass (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 96). Studies with Black immigrants from the Caribbean have highlighted that the option available to 'second' generation youths is not to become 'American' but to become 'African American' (Waters, 1994, p. 800) – a trajectory generally associated with downward social mobility.

The 'segmented assimilation' approach and related debates have made important contributions by drawing attention to the entrenched race and class dynamics of American society, and by highlighting that cultural ties with the 'homeland' can be an asset rather than a liability. However, they have relatively little to say about religion, even though religion arguably plays a major role for how American identity has been defined since 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' (see e.g. Abu El-Haj, 2010, 2015). Also, many Muslim West African parents worry at least as much about their children losing their faith and becoming 'assimilated' into Western secularism as they worry about their children joining the Black American 'underclass'. This highlights that we need to move beyond merely economic/class-focused definitions of 'success' – which have predominated in much social reproduction theory – to also include religious, cultural and moral considerations (cf. Hoechner, 2018, p. 70ff.; Newman, 2016, p. 21ff.). Coe and Shani (2015, p. 568) for example argue that many of the US-based Ghanaian parents in their research cared not only about ensuring their offspring's economic success, but also about 'making their children be virtuous, happy, or obedient.'

What is more, often the terms 'migrants' children' and 'second generation' have been taken as unproblematic categories, obscuring the huge diversity of trajectories and experiences subsumed under these labels. According to van Geel and Mazzucato (2018, p. 2146), focusing on where a person was born prioritises 'one unidirectional movement' from a 'country of "origin" to a new "country of destination". Further moves, occurring before or after the first international move, are not considered in these conceptualisations' (ibid). Van Geel and

Mazzucato (2018, p. 2145) urge us to pay greater attention to variations in mobility trajectories, as according to them, 'it may be precisely this variation that can help us to understand how migration impacts youth' (see also Zeitlyn, 2015, p. 68).

This paper pays close attention to young people's actual mobility patterns in a transnational context, shedding light on how 'homeland' stays of different durations and formats play out in young people's lives. By asking about young people's experiences of their transnational mobility, I speak on the one hand to empirical discussions about the place of homeland returns in transnational migrants' parenting projects. As I highlighted in the introduction to this paper, the parents participating in my research keenly surveyed the experiences of others as they were considering their own options for raising children.

On the other hand, by studying young people's transnational mobility, I seek to contribute to emerging theoretical debates about social reproduction in a 'transnational social field' (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Others (e.g. Coe & Shani, 2015; Zeitlyn, 2015) have cogently argued that transnational child-rearing practices cannot be understood appropriately within a framework that posits societies as neatly bounded entities. This is because 'many immigrants and their children live with an orientation that crosses national borders,' which 'complicates what success means to them' (Coe & Shani, 2015; Levitt, 2009). Living with a 'dual frame of reference' (Coe & Shani, 2015, p. 564) makes educational strategies particularly tricky, as valued forms of cultural capital may be available to be acquired in one context, but not in another, forcing families to take their pick. The US-based Ghanaian parents in Coe and Shani's (2015) study for example find that valued behaviours, such as a sense of obligation towards others, 'obedience and the ability to persevere' (2015, p. 582) are difficult to inculcate in the US. Other forms of valued cultural capital, notably American educational credentials, are impossible to acquire in Ghana, leaving parents with a dilemma. The Senegalese parents in this

study felt equally torn as they tried to make the best possible decision about where to raise their children, how long to leave them in any given location and what schools to enrol them in.

Another challenge inherent in transnational child-raising strategies is that there is a real risk that the skills and behaviours considered valuable cultural capital in one context may not be recognised as such in a different context (Coe & Shani, 2015, p. 566). This makes 'the reproduction of social class intergenerationally … an unstable and fraught process, as people invest in certain kinds of skills and educational experiences for their children that may or may not pay off' (see also Zeitlyn, 2015, p. 36). This paper highlights how certain forms of cultural capital were difficult to transport between settings, meaning that the young Senegalese-Americans in my research risked that their cultural capital would be 'misrecognised'. This was the case notably with respect to disciplined behaviour. To complicate things further, parents and children did not always agree on what should count as valuable cultural capital and how it ought to be inculcated.

Finally, this paper highlights the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective on social reproduction in transnational social fields. In the early works on social reproduction (e.g. Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Willis, 1981), an emphasis on class inequalities prevailed. Yet, later authors have sought to broaden the focus of the enquiry and stressed that, while class remains important, other axes of social division – which cannot be reduced to class – need to be taken into consideration as well. These include gender as well as race and religion, which are crucial markers of difference in the context of the present study, as highlighted above (for a particularly insightful discussion on race, see Rollock et al., 2014, p. 12ff.; Zeitlyn, 2015).

Differences in the class status of transnational migrants between their homeland and the country of immigration have been widely recognized in the literature (on West African migrants specifically, see Coe & Shani, 2015; Kane, 2011). It has been argued that memories/reminders of high class status in the 'homeland' can boost immigrants' children's confidence, and help

them get ahead in the country of immigration (e.g. Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). Comparably, the participants in my research explained that witnessing poverty in Senegal made them appreciate the opportunities available to them in the US more and helped them stay focus in their educational endeavours. At the same time, however, dynamics around language acquisition and discipline threatened young people's opportunities to achieve social mobility upon their arrival/return to the US.

What do we know about the dynamics around race and religion? A growing body of literature documents that both can assume very different meanings depending on the setting (Abdullah, 2010; Kane, 2011; Zeitlyn, 2015; for a literary engagement with these issues, see Adichie, 2013). The young people in this research straddled a setting where being Muslim, African and Black is the norm, and another where encounters with Islamophobia and racism were frequent. This paper explores to what extent visits/stays in Senegal could help these young people stay strong in the face of Islamophobia and racism.

Research context and educational decision making

I collected the data for this paper during seven months of fieldwork in Dakar, the capital of Senegal, which is a 95% Muslim country, between 2014 and 2016, and during seven months of fieldwork in New York and adjacent New Jersey in the United States in 2017 and 2018. I collected data in the form of ethnographic fieldwork observations in different schools, including Islamic schools, in both Senegal and the US, where I interviewed headmasters, teachers and students. In the US, this included an International High School attended primarily by students who had arrived in, or returned to the US only recently.

I also collected data more widely through semi-structured interviews, group conversations and casual interactions with Senegalese migrants and their children in non-school

settings in both Senegal and the US. I chose New York/New Jersey as fieldwork locations since New Yorkers were well represented among the sent back children and youths I met in Senegal, and because the greater New York area is a hub for Senegalese migrants in the US. I also conducted telephone interviews with two young women whom I was introduced to through my contacts, but whom I couldn't meet in person because they lived elsewhere in the United States. In this paper, I mostly present data collected with young Senegalese-Americans in the US, though I also occasionally draw on conversations I had with partly American-raised children and youths in Senegal.

Many Senegalese parents in the US share certain expectations about how children ought to be/behave, often with the implicit assumption that these expectations conform to Islamic norms. Respect for elders is a central value they hope to instil, alongside a sense of responsibility for others, especially family members, and a commitment to discipline and hard work (cf. Abotsi, 2019). Parents also expect their children to take their religious practice – notably their daily prayers – seriously, to adopt a 'decent' dress code and demeanour, and to stay away from comportments considered problematic and un-Islamic, including premarital sex (especially for girls), same-sex relationships, and the consumption of drugs and alcohol.

Like the Ghanaian parents in Coe and Shani's research (2015), my respondents placed high value on American education credentials, notably college degrees, for securing a good future for their children. Arguably, this is related to their own experiences of limited mobility in the US labour market. While the educational / socioeconomic profiles of Senegalese migrants in the US are fairly diverse, including both university graduates and so-called *modou-modous* without any formal education, many work in professions for which no formal diploma are required.

While affirming the importance of American education credentials, many of my respondents were concerned about the environments in which their children were to acquire

these credentials, given that most of them found themselves confined to socially deprived inner-city neighbourhoods. Parents felt that these neighbourhoods were not a good place to nurture in children the behavioural norms they wished to see. Raising adolescents was considered particularly problematic. Parents feared that their sons may drift off into gang violence, drugs, and delinquency. For girls, protecting their sexuality was a major concern. Parents worried about both boys and girls 'becoming' homosexual in a social environment – especially schools – that emphasises LGBTQ rights. Finally, parents felt unable to ensure that children acquire the requisite religious knowledge to withstand these perceived risks in an environment where full-time Islamic education is prohibitively costly,[4] and where weekend Qur'anic schools struggle to 'build' more during a limited number of hours than society 'crushes', as one Qur'anic teacher put it. Rather than taking the risk of children going 'off the rails' during their middle or high school years, many parents felt that it was safer to send them at least temporarily back to Senegal. Such decisions were taken in an environment where many parents struggled to live up to their own ideals of parenting due to frequent divorces[5] and long working hours, rendered inevitable by high rent prices.

Some migrants' children spend all their childhood and youth in Senegal and move to the US only for high school or tertiary education, or to start work. Others spend only their early childhood (ca. 2-5 years) in Senegal, usually looked after by grandparents or other family members when their care is particularly burdensome for their parents in the US given busy work schedules and the high costs of professional childcare. Other children leave the US when they are old enough to be accepted into a Qur'anic boarding school in Senegal, usually around age six or seven, and return to the US one or several years later after having acquired some

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[4] Private full-time Islamic schools mostly charge fees of $US 400 minimum per month, which is beyond the financial reach of most migrant families, especially if they must cater to several children simultaneously.
[5] Marriages are extremely fragile in a context where both spouses work long hours outside the home. This triggers conflicts about the distribution of domestic chores, and about financial responsibility for the household budget (Kane, 2011).

knowledge of the Qur'an. Another frequent practice is to send young people, especially boys, back to Senegal at the beginning of adolescence for disciplining or to get them out of trouble. Finally, children may visit Senegal during their summer holidays.

In many cases, decisions about childrearing are taken in function of parents'/families' wider plans and (economic) circumstances and constraints (see discussion above). However, also in situations where families had more latitude, the young people in my research mostly had limited direct say in decisions about where they would be raised, even though they often could influence such decisions indirectly. Even though most parents were aware of their children's preferences, they felt that as adults (and Muslims) they were responsible for ensuring arrangements that would serve their children well in the long term. What is more, in many cases children and youth were relocated to Senegal to 'correct' their behaviour – not something all of them would have signed up to voluntarily. Several of the youths I met in Senegal had been made to believe that they were going on holidays and didn't realise until later that their stays were going to be longer-term. Young people did have some measure of influence over the format and duration of their stays in Senegal though, and routinely cajoled their parents, especially mothers, into changing them into a different school, for example. I also heard stories of young people 'boycotting' school in Senegal to be allowed back to the US, though the young people in my research mostly agreed that 'doing good' was more likely to earn them permission to return to the US. The next section explores how young people looked back at their sojourns in Senegal once they had moved (back) to the US, and what difficulties they encountered trying to 'fit back in' there.

'I'm not just here to be here': Appreciating opportunities in the US against the backdrop of Senegal

Even though many of the young people in my research had strong reservations about life in the US (see below), on balance most of them agreed that it offered more educational, professional and economic opportunities. Some argued that 'thinking back' of Senegal helped them stay focused and remember what they had come to the US for. Arguably, return visits to Senegal thus increased their cultural capital by strengthening their sense of purpose and perseverance. This echoes van Geel and Mazzucato's (2017) findings about young Dutch-Ghanaians' experiences of 'return' visits to Ghana. Witnessing poverty and seeing 'what a hustle daily life can be in Ghana' made these youths see in sharper perspective 'how lucky they are to have the opportunity to be in Europe' (see also Reisel et al., 2018, p. 166).

Homeland visits also allowed young people to reconnect with people back home. To some extent, this strengthened their sense of obligation towards members of their extended family – an important part of the moral sensibilities their parents hope to instil. Abdoulmoutalib (12th grade), who returned to Senegal half way through his high school years because his parents worried about his and his older brother's comportments and social contacts, and came back to the US only for the final year of high school, explained that the sojourn in Senegal had taught him the purpose of being in the US:

> So I learned that, I know what brought me back here [to the US]. Like, I'm here to learn, I'm here to be successful. I'm here – I'm here to be somebody. Like, I'm not just here to be here. And to know what I left back in my country [Senegal]. I know people are suffering there, anything I could do to help, I will, family members, you know.[6] (Interview, New York, 2017)

While Abdoulmoutalib stated that he now knew what he was in the US for, he also emphasised that it was important to regularly refresh memories of the homeland in young people's minds

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[6] Not everybody accepted responsibility for members of their extended family in Senegal quite as easily though. Notably my older research participants (in their early twenties) who had entered the job market asserted that they were ready to support their aging parents, but unwilling to shoulder quite as heavy a burden as their parents, especially fathers, had carried to support extended families in Senegal.

through vacation visits to achieve optimal results. Being reminded that Senegal was – in Abdoulmoutalib's words – 'not … nice to be as a young kid who wanna be successful in life' – would help young people realise that 'to be able to stay there [in the US] I should do good, because over here [in Senegal] is not good.' Alas, only the better-faring migrant families can permit themselves this luxury: a return ticket from the East Coast US to Senegal costs well over $US 1,000, and most families have several children to cater for. This is a reminder that opportunities to acquire desired moral sensibilities and valued cultural capital, such as perseverance and a sense of purpose, are stratified, and that spending capacity maintains its importance for social reproduction in a transnational setting. The next sections explore the strengthened confidence young people drew from stays in Senegal regarding their racial and religious identities.

'They just don't know where they came from, and you know': Dealing with fraught race relations

Many of the young people in my research had encountered some form of racism/xenophobia in the US, including those who had spent most of their childhood/youth there and didn't have an African accent. Experiences ranged from being mocked for eating 'smelly' food for lunch or having parents wearing traditional African clothes to being taunted for having 'big lips' and being 'too dark'. In this context, visits to Senegal could allay their sense of insecurity. The young 'returnees' who participated in my research in Senegal found it reassuring to find themselves in a social environment where they did not stand out as different. Mansour, a 14-year-old boy who had grown up in Detroit, for example, explained that

> over there [in the US], you see, [people would say] oh look, look, his dad is African, look at his dad, look at what he's wearing, look at her mum, look at what she's wearing, or whatever, but here, you could be anything you want. They won't – they won't say, look at that African guy, look at that African kid. (Interview, Dakar/Senegal, 2016)

To some extent, for the young people in my research, knowing their 'homeland' was a source of resilience when facing denigrating attitudes in the US (cf. Levitt, 2009). Several youths in my research described relationships with Black Americans in particular as fraught with tensions.[7] For 17-year-old Mame Diarra, who had spent her early childhood years in Senegal, her knowledge of Senegal was a source of confidence in conflicts with Black American schoolmates:

> They [Black Americans] try to mess with you, but then again, you know, if you learned your history and stuff, you know that they come from Africa as well, so, you guys are all the same! They just don't know where they came from, and you know where you come from … And it should be a blessing that you know where you come from. Like you don't wanna just stay in America all your life and not know, and I feel like they're just mad about that, they're jealous. So that's why they try to bully the Africans that actually know where they're coming from. (Interview, New Jersey/US, 2018)

As the example of Mame Diarra shows, knowledge of the 'homeland' can serve as a source of resilience, situating identity in a transnational space. The next section explores how race intersects with religion.

Islam, ISIS and the importance of 'having a point of reference'

It has been argued that race has long been a 'master status' for Blacks in America, meaning society perceived racial identity as an individual's defining feature (Kane, 2011, p. 233; Waters, 1999, p. 5). Arguably, since 9/11 and the 'War on Terror', religion has increasingly come to play this role. While Muslims have been singled out as presumed enemies of the nation already under

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[7] Kane (2011, p. 240) attributes such tense relationships to continental Africans' lack of sensitivity towards the long history of institutional racism and the civil rights struggle, to discrimination in the job market against Black Americans in favour of immigrants, and to continental Africans' self-perceptions as 'hardworking Blacks'. Many continental Africans accept entrenched stereotypes about Black Americans as lazy welfare scroungers and criminals unquestioningly, showing little awareness of either the racist history of these stereotypes, or the socio-economic stratification among America's Black population (ibid, p. 240). Conversely, American Blacks may not be completely immune to widespread stereotypical/racist depictions of Africa as poor, backward and conflict-ridden.

George W Bush (Abu El-Haj, 2010), Islamophobia has become official state policy under the Trump administration.[8]

 Islamophobia was well present in the American school environments of the young people participating in my research. 14-year-old Abidine put it the following way:

> You know ISIS, … they think ISIS is Muslim, and that's what Muslim people do, terrorism and stuff. So when they see a Muslim, they get scared and stuff. (Interview, Dakar/Senegal, 2016)

It has been argued that West Africans are not necessarily immediately recognisable as Muslims, and therefore to some extent protected from discrimination (Abdullah, 2010). Also, it has been sustained that even when West Africans are recognised as Muslims, they are likely to be categorised as 'good', unthreatening Muslims, given that in the public imagination terrorism is mostly associated with the Arab world and South/Southeast Asia (Kane, 2011, p. 234).

 Given the media attention the Nigerian terror group *Boko Haram* has received in the context of the kidnapping of the 'Chibok girls',[9] it is questionable to what extent African Muslims still pass as unsuspicious in the public imagination. Especially the *hijabis* among my respondents, who can be identified as Muslims swiftly, routinely reported having experienced harassment. Some of the boys and youths confided to me that they do not always publicly identify as Muslim. Mansour, whom I cited earlier and interviewed in Senegal, explained when I asked whether people in Detroit knew that he was Muslim:

> Mansour (14 years): Me, I, like at one point I get sc- I don't know, I don't wanna tell them and that.
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> Thierno (14 years): You get scared, like.
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> Mansour: Yeah, it's a feeling, I don't know how to explain it, but now I'm just like, yeah,

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[8] See e.g. President Trump's executive order halting all refugee admissions and temporarily barring people from seven Muslim-majority countries widely dubbed the 'Muslim ban' (see e.g. "Trump's executive order: Who does travel ban affect?," 2017).

[9] See e.g. "Nigeria Chibok abductions: What we know," 2017.

I'm a Muslim, yeah. It doesn't matter. (Interview, Dakar/Senegal, 2016)

Visits to the 'homeland' could allay to some extent the sense of insecurity many young Muslims experience in an overwhelmingly hostile environment. As Aminata (early thirties) explains, spending time in Senegal strengthened her confidence that Islam is not the violent religion as which it is often portrayed:

> in Senegal, Muslims are very – they're the most peaceful people you'll ever see… So if you're saying that Muslims are just terrorists, that's – that was a big statement to make, you know… I feel like, growing up between the two countries, it made it easier to see how microscopic people can be in terms of believing what a religion is, and I have the opportunity to say, no, that's not true! This [referring to violence and terrorism] isn't happened [sic] in all – with all Muslims, I'm a Muslim and this doesn't happen. And if you go to my country in Senegal, and – and I had a point of reference. But some people do not have a point of reference. (Phone interview, 2017)

When comparing themselves to others, including younger siblings, growing up primarily or exclusively in the US, respondents who had spent considerable time in West Africa argued that they were more likely to follow religious precepts, such as attending a mosque for the Friday prayer, accepting to marry a fellow Muslim, or (notably for girls) protecting their sexuality/virginity (cf. Reisel et al., 2018). In part, this was because they felt more connected to other people practicing Islam, which highlights the importance of active participation in a particular social field for its norms to keep their traction. One female youth (12th grade) for instance emphasised that she felt strongly about not disappointing people 'back home', who in large part expect that America will eventually 'corrupt' those setting foot there.[10] However, it would be mistaken to assume that homeland stays/visits necessarily make young people consent to 'Senegalese' definitions of valued behaviour or strategies for inculcating it. This is what I

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[10] Many Senegalese hold strong opinions about American-raised youngsters (see e.g. Hoechner (2017a)), which are to some extent gendered. American-raised boys are often deemed disrespectful and unruly, whereas American-raised girls are presumed to have looser morals than their Senegalese-raised counterparts.

turn to next.

'American' frames of reference

Some young people in my research stated that having been to the 'homeland' helped them understand the expectations their parents had of them (cf. Reisel et al., 2018). However, this did not necessarily mean that they agreed with them on all accounts or considered these expectations legitimate. A theme that came up several times was how to react to elders perceived to be wrong. Several of the American-raised youths I met in Senegal had run into problems there because their outspokenness was considered rude. Abdoulmoutalib told me that if there was one thing he had learned from being back in Senegal, it was to bite his tongue:

> I learned from my mistakes, even though I think it's not a mistake but people think it's a mistake, alright, it's a mistake then! Like you know, sometime my dad might think this is wrong but I think it's not wrong, I will take it as wrong because I always have respect over elders, whatever they say, I feel like, even though they're lying and I'm not, I will just act like they said the truth you know. (Interview, New York/US, 2017)

While Abdoulmoutalib had decided to bow to his father's position, he clearly did not think that the latter was right. This highlights that sojourns in Senegal did not necessarily mean that young people adopted 'Senegalese' frames of reference. This applies also to their retrospective evaluations of experiences made in Senegal. One young woman (early twenties), who had spent her early childhood years in Senegal unaccompanied by her parents for example explained to me that she finds such separations harmful for a child's development and would never subject her own children to a similar experience. In Senegal, where fostering is common and where many people consider stays in (Qur'anic) boarding schools or with members of the extended family important to instil desired moral sensibilities and forms of cultural capital, including discipline (see e.g. Alber et al., 2013; Bledsoe, 1990), it is rare to hear similar complaints.

The young people in my research also took strong stances on physical punishments, which are common in Senegal (and notably in Qur'anic schools, see e.g. Ware, 2014), yet largely forbidden by child protection laws in the US. Rather than accepting such punishments as a legitimate form of disciple and essential part of child-rearing, the young people looked back critically at experiences of physical punishment, and labelled them 'abuse' and 'violence' (see Hoechner, 2020 for a more extensive discussion). Such critical perspectives highlight the limits of homeland stays as a means for inculcating particular moral sensibilities and forms of cultural capital. Disagreement may also arise about the strategies used to bring about desired behaviours, especially where there were strong tensions between 'American' and 'Senegalese' ways of doing things. Building on this insight, the next section takes a closer look at the challenges young people face as they move between American and Senegalese values and settings.

'They had my back, I had their back': new vulnerabilities upon return

A common trope in my research was that young people, especially boys who had been for a long time under the strict regime of a Qur'anic boarding school before coming/returning to the US, struggle to adjust to US life. One of my respondents (in his mid-twenties) who himself had grown up transnationally and was very well connected in the 'second generation' Senegalese community in New York argued that after having been under strict surveillance for the better part of their childhood/youth, such youths were all into parties and girls when arriving in the US. Having 'not had a life' for several years, they were impatient to catch up on the experiences of their American-raised peers.

While it is questionable how representative this description is, the behaviour of recent 'arrivals' or 'returnees', notably boys, was indeed a frequent cause for concern for both parents and peers who worried about the positive effects of Senegal on these youths becoming swiftly

undone. I heard regular complaints about recently arrived/returned boys getting into constant fights and about young people 'Americanising' too quickly for the taste of their parents and some of their peers. Some of my respondents found fault with the parents of these young people. One young woman (in her early twenties) who for most of her education had attended a Qur'anic school in Senegal for example argued that parents were likely to spoil their children after long periods of separation. Parents, she argued,

> try to give them everything they want. Because they're missing four years in their life. So, spoil *boobu dileendi def* [they spoil them], and they don't tell them revise your Quran, *jangat sa al Quran bi* [revise your Qur'an], because the kids, they say, oh, I'm too busy watching this TV, and you know, they're missing a lot in their life … and they want to catch up. (Interview, New York/US, 2018)

Parents in the US were criticised not only for being too soft on their children. Some young people in my research also complained of overly strict parents, who, terrified by the prospect of their children making the 'wrong friends' in their socially deprived neighbourhoods and schools, kept closed taps on them – not always to the desired effect. One of my respondents confided to me how he ended up going behind his father's back:

> I was in that position where he always told me no, no, no. And I always used to be like, I jus' went behind him. That's – sometimes I would not – I would tell him 'dad, I have a soccer game.' He would let me out and I'm not actually going to a soccer game, I would go to my friends just to hang out. Because it was just too much, you cannot just stay in the house all day, frustrated, yeah … They only wanna hear the good part of the life, like, soccer, ok, go! My friends – 'what friends you have? I told you 'don't have friends!'' (Interview, New York/US, 2017)

Adjusting to a different disciplinary regime in their school environment was also noted to be a challenge for young people. One male youth at the International High School in New York where I conducted part of my research explained to me that in his view, the school was too lax:

> But here principal is too soft [sic], they're too friendly! It's not about – but it's too friendly

to the world, to the students. I mean, it's good, at the same time, cause they're immigrants, trust me, immigrants, if you give them easy time, they're gonna take it… it's too much freedom. It's too much. No teacher yell at you if you walk out the door… it's a good school but it's too much freedom. (Interview New York/US, 2017)

Interestingly, this student himself was notorious for skipping class – and it took me several visits to his school before I actually met him there to conduct the interview he had agreed to.

It is important to bear in mind that experiences of – and reactions to – different disciplinary regimes are likely to be gendered. Aminata, whom I have referred to earlier, for example, described how she got in trouble with a teacher in her US school because she persistently lowered her gaze when being talked to, which said teacher considered to be rude. In Senegal, not looking an elder in the eyes is a sign of respect, and girls in particular are encouraged to follow this rule. The conflict was resolved only upon the intermediation of one of Aminata's relatives.

To put negative comments about young 'returnees' into perspective it is important to also understand how stressful it is for young people to arrive (back) in the US and to settle (back) into deprived inner-city neighbourhoods and schools after at times long periods of absence. For some, getting their English (back) to standard is a real challenge (cf. Reisel et al., 2018), and particular middle school was described by many as an unforgiving environment where those with African accents are pitilessly mocked and bullied. The harsh realities of life in American inner cities catches many young people off guard, given the positive image the US have among many young West Africans (see e.g. Coe, 2012). One of my male respondents (12th grade) summed up his and his peers' disappointing experience of moving to the US as 'I don't think any African kid likes America!'

In order to fit into a difficult environment, some recent returnees may adopt behaviours that worry their parents. Abdoulmoutalib (12th grade), who was born in the US but had done his

primary education in Senegal, explained about his middle school experience in the US:

> Because middle school was tough, how we're African, sometimes there was hate, sometime, race, you know, mh, sometime I just thought I should have been in the – bad part to be protected because middle school was tough, like my middle school was tough, like really tough. So I thought I should have been with the bad boys to be protected. You feel me? So yeah. And I – after I left there [transferring to a different NYC school], I took them as my family, because they had my back, and I had their back… (Interview, New York/US, 2017)

As mentioned earlier, Abdoulmoutalib's parents sent him back to Senegal for two years before letting him return to the US to finish high school as they were worried about his behaviour and social contacts. His case is not an isolated one. Boys from two other families I got to know were also sent 'back' a second time because their parents were unhappy about their behaviour – in one case only a couple of months after the first 'return' to the US. Parents talked about this as a problem of their children 'not being ready yet' for life in the US. One mother, who lamented her son's rapid 'Americanisation' after returning to the US at age ten, told me that if she could turn back time and decide again, she would leave her children in Senegal until after adolescence so 'their mind is very… sealed to the culture, to the religion'.

Of course, leaving children in Senegal until they are almost adults has a cost. They will likely struggle to accumulate the social and cultural capital required for successful academic careers in the US. This includes learning enough English to perform well on the standardised tests regulating college access and developing a social network of teachers and American peers who can guide them with respect to scholarships and college choices. It has been argued that 'bridging agents, telling students about the importance of SAT [Scholastic Aptitude Test] scores, the significance of timely applications, and the paramount role played by well-crafted personal statements and letters of recommendation' are crucial for migrants' children's educational and professional success (Fernandez-Kelly, 2008, p. 123). The young participants in my research confirmed this, highlighting how important it was to be physically present in the US during the

last years of high school at least to connect with teachers and councillors who could offer advice on college applications.

Conclusion

This paper analyses the dilemmas Senegalese migrant families in the US face as they try to secure a 'good future' for their children, thereby adding to debates about transnational child-rearing, return mobilities and social reproduction in a transnational social field. Parents' motivations for educating children partly or entirely in the 'homeland' have received growing attention within the literature. However, much less has been written about young people's experiences of their transnational mobility. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to predict how transnational child-rearing practices work out in the long run, I have sought to explore some of the more immediate challenges and opportunities arising for young people from their transnational mobility.

Visits/stays in Senegal equip young people with cultural and religious resources or capital that help them deal with the challenges of living in the US as part of a triple minority as Blacks, immigrants, and Muslims. However, homeland stays are not a magic bullet. Rather, there is a risk that they create a set of new vulnerabilities that limit young people's chances of becoming socially mobile. When young people arrive in, or return to the US after stints in Senegal, they may struggle to adjust to an unfamiliar language, social environment and disciplinary regime, which risks jeopardising their educational trajectories. This corroborates the findings of others who have highlighted the double-edged nature of homeland stays/visits (e.g. Coe & Shani, 2015; Reisel et al., 2018).

In theoretical terms, this paper adds to the work of others who explore the vagaries of social reproduction in a transnational social field (Coe, 2014; Coe & Shani, 2015; Zeitlyn, 2015). Dual frames of reference make it more complicated to define what counts as valuable

cultural capital and they raise questions about the extent to which such capital can be translated into social/economic opportunities in different contexts. The examples in this paper have highlighted that certain forms of cultural capital seem to travel between different contexts with greater ease than others. A strengthened sense of purpose could help the young people in this research in their educational endeavours. Norms surrounding discipline, on the other hand, appeared to create a series of problems.

The paper has also highlighted that parents and children did not always agree on what counts as desirable behaviour and appropriate strategies for inculcating it. We may call to mind for example my young respondents' objections to physical punishments and critique of separating young children from their parents. This highlights the importance of complementing studies of parents' perspectives with an exploration of young people's own views.

Finally, the paper has argued in favour of using an intersectional lens for studying social reproduction in transnational social fields. Dynamics around race and religion are of paramount importance both for the decisions of parents and the experiences of young people discussed in this paper. It is doubtful whether homeland visits/stays improve young Senegalese-Americans' class position in the US. Yet, they are likely to strengthen their identification and self-confidence as Muslims and Africans. While many of my respondents agreed with Abdoulmoutalib that regular but short homeland visits may unlock the positive effects of such visits while eschewing the problems associated with longer stays, this is not an option available to many families, given the significant costs associated with frequent travel. For those parents constrained by limited finances, there are thus no easy/unproblematic choices. Conversations such as those in Fatou's living room cited at the beginning of this chapter are thus likely to continue for some time.

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