

# **International migrations of Congolese and Senegalese women: new forms of autonomous mobility or persistence of family migration patterns?**

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## **Abstract**

Previous research, mostly focused on Asian and Latin American contexts, found that women are increasingly present in international migration flows, especially so as independent economic actors. This paper examines the extent to which these two trends - the feminization of migration flows and an increase in autonomous female migration – can be observed in the African context. It uses data collected within the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project in Senegal, DR Congo and several European countries. Discrete-time event-history analysis reveals only moderate increases in the likelihood of female migration over time, but no decline in gender gaps. The collection of rich retrospective information from both current and return migrants allows a more in-depth investigation of the nature of women’s moves. Several indicators were used in an attempt to grasp the extent to which women moved autonomously or in association to their partner. While some evidence of a rise in autonomous female migration was found among the Congolese, no salient change was visible in Senegal. This was interpreted in light of the more rigid patriarchal system and traditional gender norms characterizing Senegal. The paper also shows that different indicators do not all point in the same direction suggesting that the borders between autonomous and associational moves are often blurred.

## **1. Introduction**

While women’s international migration is not a new phenomenon, women have long been absent from research on migration (Morokvasic 2008; Boyd and Grieco 2003). Men were perceived to be the only protagonists of international mobility while women were either seen as left behind or passively following their husbands. However, since the 1980s, research has increasingly brought women at the forefront of attention and argued that a trend towards a feminization of migration flows can be observed. Furthermore, the focus shifted away from the “trailing wives” to autonomously migrating women who worked in the domestic and care sectors, the emblematic figure being the Filipino nannies or nurses (Tacoli 1999; King and Zontini 2000).

The patterns of female migrations and the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon have mostly been analyzed in the context of Asian and Latin American migrations to Europe or the United States (Truong 1996; Pessar 1999; King and Zontini 2000; Catarino and Morokvasic 2005; Massey et. Al 2006). Much less research, especially of a quantitative nature, focuses on African women’s international mobility patterns, as data are lacking. Focusing on internal migration, recent work has emphasized an unprecedented development of autonomous female moves from rural to urban areas within several African countries (Findley 1997; Antoine et Sow 2000; Bocquier et Traoré 2000; Lesclingand 2011). Other studies have, however, underlined the continuing importance of the family dimension in these mobilities (Mondain 2009; Comoé 2005).

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To our knowledge, these issues have so far been less investigated in the case of African women's international moves. This paper aims to fill this gap by focusing on two questions:

1. First, we examine the extent to which Congolese and Senegalese international migration flows display a trend towards an increasing feminization.
2. Second, the paper seeks to assess whether more autonomous forms of female mobility have emerged, or whether, on the contrary, African women's international migrations remain largely dictated by family strategies.

In pursuing these objectives, the paper attempts to make several distinctions, not systematically discussed in the literature. First, it is not always clear what is meant by the term "feminization" of migration: while most studies refer to a gradual increase in the percentages of migrants that are female (Castles and Miller 1998; Boyd 2006), others point to an increase in absolute levels of female mobility, while yet others to an increase in women's labour mobility in particular (IOM 2010). This paper will show that it is important to distinguish between these dimensions and that a relative increase in the share of women crossing the borders is not necessarily accompanied by an absolute increase in their numbers, which nuances the implications of the term.

Second, the literature generally considers migrations to be autonomous when the migration project seeks to satisfy the personal economic needs of the migrant (Le Jeune et al. 2005). Yet, the phenomenon is more complex and other dimensions should also be considered. Besides the reasons behind the move, its autonomous nature may be reflected in the mode of migration (whether migrants follow their partner or other members of their personal network abroad) or of travel (whether they travel alone, in couple or with others) and could be further apprehended in the decision-making process as well as the financing of the trip. This paper uses several indicators to measure this phenomenon, showing that the frontier between "autonomous" and "family-related" migration is more blurred than is often assumed.

A further limitation of most current studies is that they consider the intersection of gender and migration within a single culture. Comparative approaches are needed to better understand how culturally defined gender relations influence international migration, both in terms of *who* migrates and of *how* they migrate. In many societies, such as various Sub Saharan African countries, the social acceptance of women's independent migration is low, the only "legitimate" reason for women's mobility being family reunification. In such cultures, the prevailing discourse on female vulnerability serves to control and constrain women's migration (Lindstrom 1997). However, in other societies, such as rural Thailand, women are perceived as more reliable remitters and the family prefers the mobility of unmarried daughters to that of sons (Curran et al 2005). Comparing five Latin American countries, Massey and Fischer (2006) show that female out-migration looks very different depending on how patriarchal the gender system is. They find that in societies where women are more autonomous, independent, and less tied to men as partners, they are more likely to migrate as independent agents (Massey and Fischer 2006: p.89). Similar findings are reported by Cerrutti and Gaudio (2010) in their comparison of Mexican and Paraguayan migration patterns: gender relations (among others) affect the volume of female migrations, the characteristics of women who migrate and the channel of migration (2010: p.111).

This paper similarly adopts a comparative design and examines migration flows from DR Congo and Senegal, using identical data collected in the framework of the "Migration between Africa and Europe" project. Comparing two countries characterized by different migration histories, social and political contexts as well as differing gender norms will enable us to bring out the complexity and the heterogeneity of African women's migration patterns. The following section briefly discusses some of these differences.

## 2. Migration and gender roles in DR Congo and Senegal

While both countries gained their independence in 1960, Senegal has followed a trajectory of political stability whereas the DR Congo has known violent political conflicts. Though richer in natural resources, DR Congo is facing a poorer economic situation than Senegal and is ranked as one of the poorest nations of the world. Senegalese international migration has a long and well-documented history, going back to the First World War when many Senegalese served in France as infantrymen (Robin et al 2000). The flows intensified after the Independence, particularly towards some African countries experiencing an economic boom and to France, where the expanding automobile industry was in need of workers (Pison et al. 1997). The Congolese migrations are more recent and less documented than the Senegalese flows and are to a large extent directed to neighboring countries. Congolese migration to Europe started in the early 1960s, and consisted primarily of elites - students or professionals - sent by companies for training in Belgium, the former colonial power (Kagne and Martiniello 2001). The deteriorating economic situation and the political turmoil that resurfaced in the 1990s have intensified the migration flows. Towards Europe, these were increasingly composed of asylum-seekers (Schoumaker et al. 2009). Starting in the 1980s, both countries saw a diversification of both departure regions and destinations<sup>3</sup>, with Italy and Spain attracting a large number of Senegalese, while the United Kingdom and France became an important destination for the Congolese.

There is some evidence of differing gender relations in the two contexts. In DR Congo as in Senegal, women are traditionally subordinated to male authority. In both countries, the positions of social and economic responsibility are undeniably falling on the men (Pilon and Vignikin 1996). Being less educated than men, women are also less present on the labour market where they occupy more precarious jobs. However, the severe crisis that DR Congo has been experiencing in recent decades has been operating changes in these social relations (Verhaegen 1990, Mianda 1996, Bouchard 2002, Ngoie Tshibambe 2007; Batumike 2009). As unemployment rose among men, women found themselves forced to take over their husbands' responsibilities, to exit the domestic sphere and take on all sorts of small jobs. According to some authors, the crisis has weakened the men's social position and has forced them to accept the economic participation of their spouses, who have gained considerably in social status and decision-making power within the family (Mianda 1996; Bouchard 2003).

In Senegal, as elsewhere in Sub Saharan Africa, persistent economic hardships have similarly increased women's role in household survival strategies, but the crisis has not been as severe as in Congo, and women's economic participation does not have the same social meaning. Using biographic data collected in Dakar in 2006, Adjamagbo et al (2006:13) find that the ideal model of marriage described by both men and women envisages the man as the sole provider of the material and financial comfort of the family and excludes women from any work obligation. If a woman does happen to work, the revenues she draws from her activity are often used for her own consumption – in clothes or finery – as it is hardly conceivable for a woman to provide for the family and to challenge thus the husband's economic role. The practice of polygamy that is frequent in Senegal, a Muslim society, may further reinforce these norms.

A comparison of the labor market situation between the two countries based on recent Demographic and Health Surveys supports these qualitative findings. In DR Congo, economic

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<sup>3</sup> In Senegal, religious networks, and in particular the Mouride brotherhood, play an increasing role in these new migration dynamics, explaining to a certain extent the diversification of destinations (Bava 2003).

activity rates among men and women are almost identical: 64 % of women versus 63,5% of men are working. In Senegal, only 38% of the women were working at the moment of the survey, compared to 66% of the men. Somewhat surprisingly, in both Dakar and Kinshasa the overall percentages are lower, but we only find a considerable gender difference in Dakar.

To summarize, traditional views about gender roles appear to preserve a stronger hold in Senegal than in DR Congo and represent a veritable obstacle to Senegalese women’s economic participation. While we are not arguing that Congolese women are fully emancipated or that DR Congo has achieved gender equality, research from the two contexts seems to suggest that Congolese women are subjected to lower social control than their Senegalese counterparts and enjoy a larger autonomy.

### 3. The “Migration between Africa and Europe” dataset

In order to answer the research questions asked in this paper, we need data collected in both origin and destination countries. First, information on migrants as well as non-migrants is necessary in order to estimate migration risks; second, direct information from migrants is required in order to achieve a better understanding of the nature and degree of autonomy involved in respondents’ international moves. Due to difficulties involved in conducting multi-sited research, many surveys limit themselves to collecting information on return migrants. However, it can be argued that returnees are a selected group and that their migration experiences are not necessarily representative of the entire migrant population. Furthermore, time-specific data on several domains of the respondents’ lives are needed for examining the evolution of the rate and type of international mobility over time.

The recently conducted Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE<sup>4</sup>) survey fulfills these requirements with respect to flows from several African countries to certain European destinations. First, a household survey was conducted in the Dakar (1200 households) and Kinshasa (1576 households) areas, collecting basic socio-demographic information on all members of the household. The paper uses this data in order to evaluate the extent to which a feminization of migration flows from these two regions can be observed. The household survey records information on all spouses and children of the household head irrespective of their current location. This is not the case for other family ties such as siblings of the household head<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the analysis sample for the first research question only includes the household head, his or her spouse(s) and his or her children. The dates and destinations of the first and last trips of all members (present or currently absent) with international migration experience were also collected. This provides the necessary information for calculating the number of *potential* as well as *actual* migrants. Table 1 presents the breakdown of the analysis sample for each country of origin with respect to gender, migration status and region of destination of the first international move for the migrants.

**Table 1 Total number of cases by gender and migration status**

	DR Congo		Senegal	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Migrants to Africa	477	324	151	77
Migrants to Western cties	166	131	254	147
Total migrants	643	455	405	224
Non-migrants	2588	2977	3117	3424
Effectif total	3231	3432	3522	3648

Source 1 MAFE household data (2008-2010)

<sup>4</sup> More information can be found on the projects’ website: <http://mafeproject.site.ined.fr/en/>

<sup>5</sup> Only a selected population of the latter would appear in the survey: those who live with the household head or who used to live in the household but are currently abroad *and* they have frequent contacts with the household.

Second, a biographic individual questionnaire, identical in each country surveyed, was used in order to collect more detailed information. A transnational sample was achieved as migrants were interviewed in several countries in Europe (200 Senegalese each in France, Italy and Spain; 279 Congolese in Belgium and 150 in the UK) and non-migrants as well as return migrants were interviewed in the capital regions of Senegal and DR Congo (1067 individuals in the Dakar area and 1645 individuals in the Kinshasa region). The questionnaire recorded retrospective information on several domains of respondents' life histories, such as their family formation history, their occupational, residential and migration trajectories, among others. This data is used to answer our second research question, with respect to the nature of individuals' international moves. Thus, the population of study for this second part of the analysis is exclusively composed of migrants, both current and returnees. Furthermore, only information on migrants' first international migration experience as an adult (between 18 and 65 years) will be analyzed. Table 2 presents the total sample by gender and destination of their first international move.

**Table 2 Total number of migrants interviewed by gender and destination**

	Congolese		Senegalese	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Migrants to Africa	259	135	109	39
Migrants to Western cttries	237	217	341	278
Total migrants	496	352	450	317

Source 2 MAFE biographic data (2008-2010)

In terms of sampling strategy, the household survey followed a three-stage probabilistic sampling design and is representative of the capital areas of the two countries. Sampling for the biographic individual component of the survey is not random, with the exception of the survey carried out in Spain, where a sampling frame was available. For the other countries, a mix of sampling methods was used and quotas were applied (for more details see Gonzalez-Ferrer and Beauchemin 2011). While innovative in some ways, the MAFE data is also vulnerable to several limitations. First, the retrospective nature of the individual questionnaire means data suffer from two main biases: on the one hand, substantial selection bias arises due to prior mortality, since estimates are only representative for the survivors. On the other hand, memory bias leads to inaccurate reporting, either from memory lapses or due to a "conscious misrepresentation of the past". Whereas the first bias is unavoidable, the survey tried to minimize the second by using life-history calendars to collect time dated events. It should also be noted that while the origin samples are representative of the Dakar and Kinshasa areas in 2008, some of the migrants interviewed at destination may not have previously lived in these regions. In the final samples, however, this was the case for only a fifth of the migrants, on average. Furthermore, the estimation of migration risks based on the household data does not take into account the migration of entire households, and may thus underestimate mobility if such cases are common<sup>6</sup>; last, a comparison across cohorts is affected by higher mortality rates in the older cohorts.

<sup>6</sup> Qualitative evidence does not suggest such a phenomenon is frequent, also given the extended nature of households in Senegal (Dia 2009).

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Do we observe a feminization of Congolese and Senegalese migration flows?

We first seek to bring to light the Congolese and Senegalese migration trends according to gender and destination (African versus Western countries), in order to examine the extent to which we can observe a feminization of these flows. These trends are estimated using discrete-time event history analysis based on the MAFE *household* data collected in the Dakar and Kinshasa regions<sup>7</sup>.

A first way to examine the feminization of migration flows is to compare men's and women's migration propensities across several cohorts. This can be done by estimating Kaplan-Meier survival curves, which illustrate cumulative probabilities of survival and also take into account right-censored observations<sup>8</sup>. In other words, they represent the distribution over time (here, function of age) of the probability of *not having experienced a migration*, by gender and cohort. Three cohorts are distinguished: those aged 50 or more in 2008 (born between 1915 and 1959), those aged between 30 and 49 (born between 1960-1979) and those aged 18 to 29 (born between 1980-1991). The latter are only observed during 10 years. Initially, all 18 year olds are in their origin country (Senegal or DR Congo). The probability to remain there diminishes with age or, in other words, the probability to move abroad increases.

Figure 1 distinguishes migrations towards African countries and those towards Western destinations. Congolese migrations to other African countries (originating in the Kinshasa area) present a relatively clear picture. From a generation to the next, we observe an acceleration of the migration calendar, which is reflected graphically through a shift towards the left of the survival curves representing more recent generations. In other words, the younger generations migrate earlier than the older ones. The intensity of the phenomenon seems also to have increased: the youngest cohorts appear the most likely to have migrated at least once in another African country by the time they turn 23. Last, for each of the three observed cohorts, gender differences do not appear to recede, as men are systematically (and significantly) more likely to migrate than women. Migrations from the Kinshasa area towards Western countries appear substantially less frequent than intr-African migrations. Furthermore, no acceleration nor any intensification of these flows can be observed. Gender gaps, however, seem to diminish for the generations born after 1960, as women seem to migrate to a similar extent and rhythm than men.

Migration trends from the Dakar area in Senegal look quite different. First, a decrease in intra-continental flows can be observed. Men belonging to the oldest cohort were significantly more likely to migrate to another African country and to start their migration at a lower age than those belonging to younger cohorts<sup>9</sup>. This has also led to a diminishing of gender gaps between subsequent generations, despite the fact that intra-continental migration propensities among women did not change significantly. A different picture emerges with respect to migrations towards Europe and North America. Both men and women aged 30 to 49 are significantly more likely to have migrated to a Western country before turning 40 than those over 50. Furthermore, although the difference is only significant for men, the calendar of these migrations seems to have accelerated between generations,

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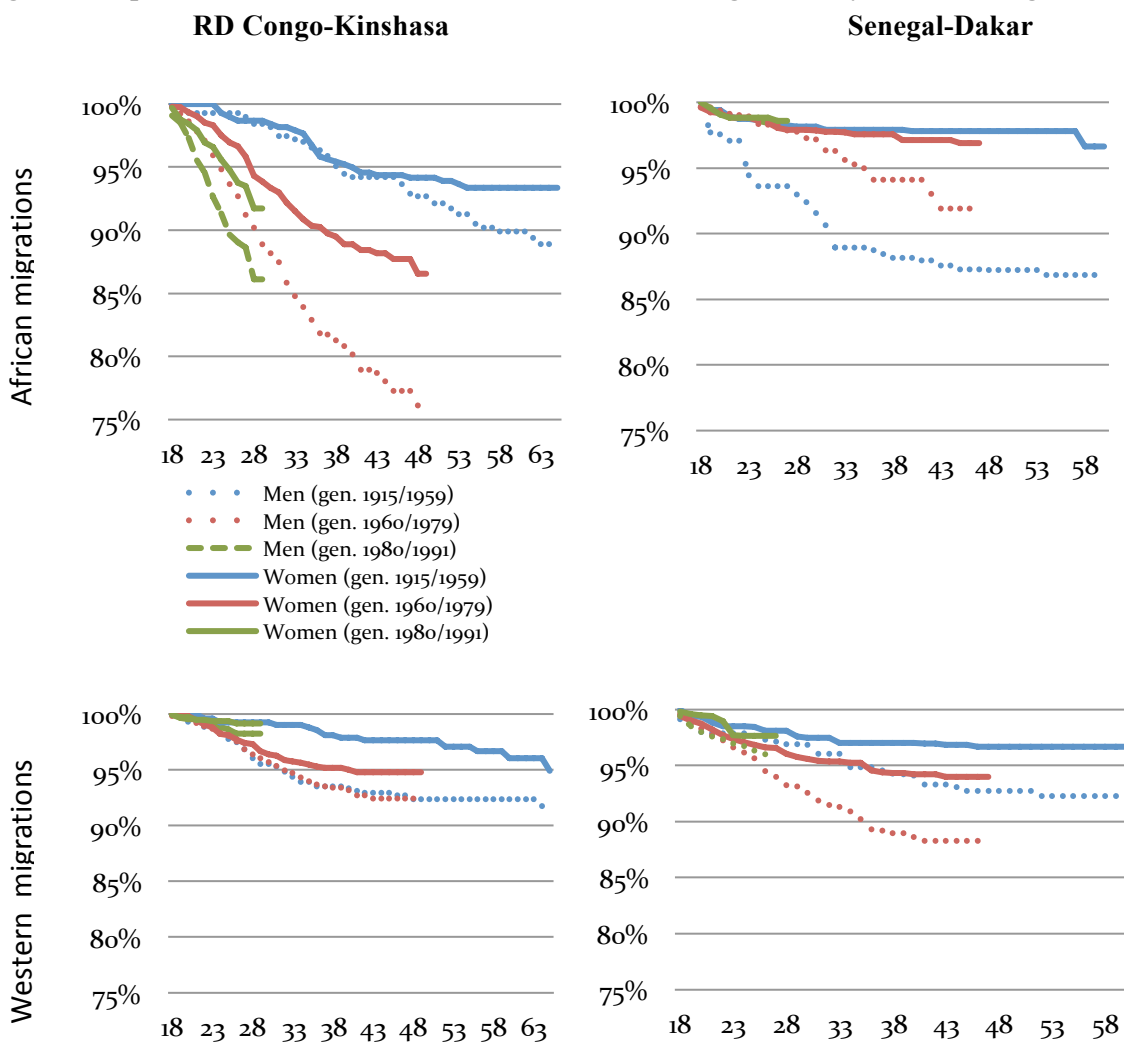
<sup>7</sup> As such, the trends we estimate are not representative nationally. However, it could be argued that a higher degree of feminization should be observed in the urban areas, especially in the capital cities, than in the country side.

<sup>8</sup> If an individual in the survey is interviewed when 25 years old and has not yet migrated, this does not mean that s/he may not migrate in the future. S/he will appear as right-censored and will no longer be counted as being "at risk" of experiencing the event after 25 years.

<sup>9</sup> 12% of men born between 1915 and 1959 had migrated to another African country by the time they turned 32, whereas this was the case for only 5% of those born between 1960 and 1979.

as the Senegalese increasingly migrate at a younger age. Finally, there is no shrinking of the gender gap between the cohorts.

**Figure 1 Kaplan-Meier survival curves of time until first migration, by destination, gender and cohort**

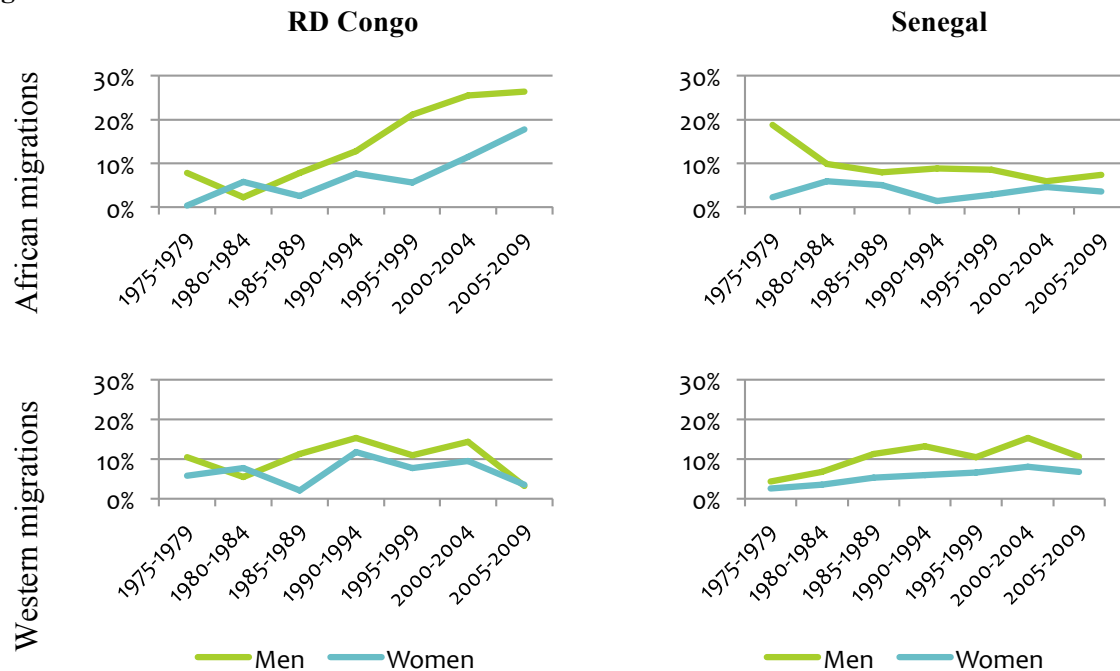


A second way to look at these trends is to follow their evolution over (historical) time. A discrete-time logistic regression model allows estimating migration odds separately by gender while taking into account age and period (five-year) effects. These odds are transformed in risks of undertaking at least one international migration between the ages of 18 and 65 (“lifetime risks”). The evolution of these migration probabilities from 1975 to 2008 is presented in **Figure 2**.

As expected, these confirm the broad trends observed with the cohort-based survival functions. With respect to intra-African flows from DRC, a clear increase in the risks of departure for both men and women can be observed from the end of the 1980s onwards. Yet, the intensity of female migrations is lower and gender differences persist and are even accentuated in recent periods. These intra-continental trends contrast with the ones towards Western destinations. First, migrations risks are lower: the probability to migrate to a Western destination does not go over 15% for men and 10% for women, at any point in time. The patterns are quite similar by gender: an increase in risks up to the middle of the 1990s – which is likely to reflect the repercussions of the severe crises of the 1991 and 1993 – followed by a period of stagnation and then a net decrease of risks in the latter periods – paralleling the improvement of political and economic conditions from 2001 onwards. Senegalese flows display different trends: intra-continental moves from Dakar have been slowly decreasing in

the past decades, as already seen in the cohort analysis; the gaps between men and women are not very large and also seem to be fading away after 2000. By contrast, trends towards Western destinations show a moderate increase, for both men and women, albeit to a smaller degree for the latter. Thus, gender differences persist across the period.

**Figure 2. Life-time risks of undertaking a first international migration between the ages of 18 and 65, by gender and destination**



Thus, findings tell a nuanced story with respect to the feminization of Congolese and Senegalese flows. On the one hand, migrations likelihood appears on the rise for Congolese women with respect to African destination and for the Senegalese with respect to Western countries, but the same can be said for their male counterparts. This increase is therefore not accompanied by a reduction in gender gaps. On the other hand, diminishing gender differences can be observed in the case of intra-continental Senegalese migrations and inter-continental Congolese flows, but this should be placed in the context of a decrease in chances to migrate towards these destinations, especially for the men. Therefore, if by feminization we understand *both* an intensification of flows and a decrease in gender gaps, we cannot say that any of the flows are so far displaying such a trend.

#### 4.2. Do we observe a rise in autonomous female migrations from DR Congo and Senegal?

The second objective of this paper is to investigate whether men and women in the two countries are converging in their experiences of migration, or whether their mobility projects and trajectories remain different. In particular, we seek to examine the extent to which women's autonomous migration has increased in recent periods. We use here the data collected through the retrospective biographic questionnaire, both from return migrants interviewed in their origin countries and from current migrants interviewed in Europe. The following analyses all refer to the *first adult migration* undertaken by the individual. We continue distinguishing between migrations to African and migrations to Western countries, but the comparison is limited. Since the survey did not interview current migrants in Africa<sup>10</sup>, findings with respect to migrations towards another African country are

<sup>10</sup> This limitation only applies to the biographic individual questionnaire ; for the household survey, all (current) migrants were reported by the household head, irrespective of the destination.

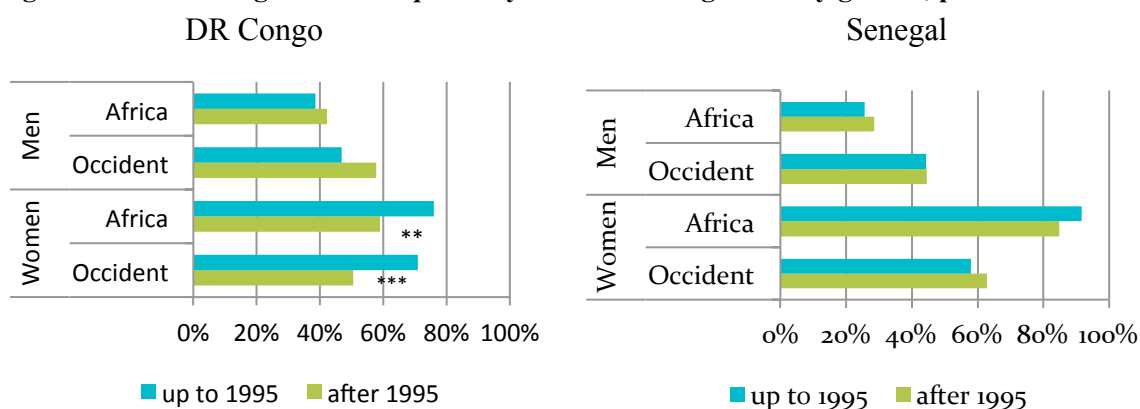


only based on those who returned to their origin country or subsequently moved to Europe, who may represent a selected sample.

Several indicators are used in order to apprehend the degree of autonomy of a move.

A first, relatively raw, indicator is migrants' family status, and in particular whether or not they are in a union<sup>11</sup> at the time of their migration. If independent female migration has increased, we should also observe an increase in the percentage of single migrants among women. Figure 3 shows that, prior to 1995, in both DR Congo and Senegal, women were substantially more likely to be in a couple at the time of their first migration than men. However, among Congolese migrants, profiles largely converged by gender in the more recent period, mostly because of a significant reduction in the share of women in couple. In Senegal, on the other hand, no significant change can be observed. A clear difference by destination emerges, as a larger share of intra-African female migrants is in couple than of women choosing Western destinations. Given the latter flows are on the rise, whereas the former are stagnating or diminishing, there is a slight overall increase in the proportion of single women migrating from Senegal.

**Figure 3 Share of migrants *in couple* the year of their migration by gender, period and destination**



The partnership status is only a raw indicator, as women could be in a couple and leave their spouse behind, arguably a case of independent economic migration. On the other hand, qualitative work has emphasized the importance of other ties in independent female migration, challenging the idea that their moves are autonomous. The MAFE data includes information on the migration trajectories (dates and destinations) of the respondents' personal circle, including their partner(s), kin and friends. Based on this, the *mode of migration* can be considered, more precisely whether migrants follow their partner abroad, follow another member of their personal network or move to a destination where they have no ties (category "alone" in Figure 4).

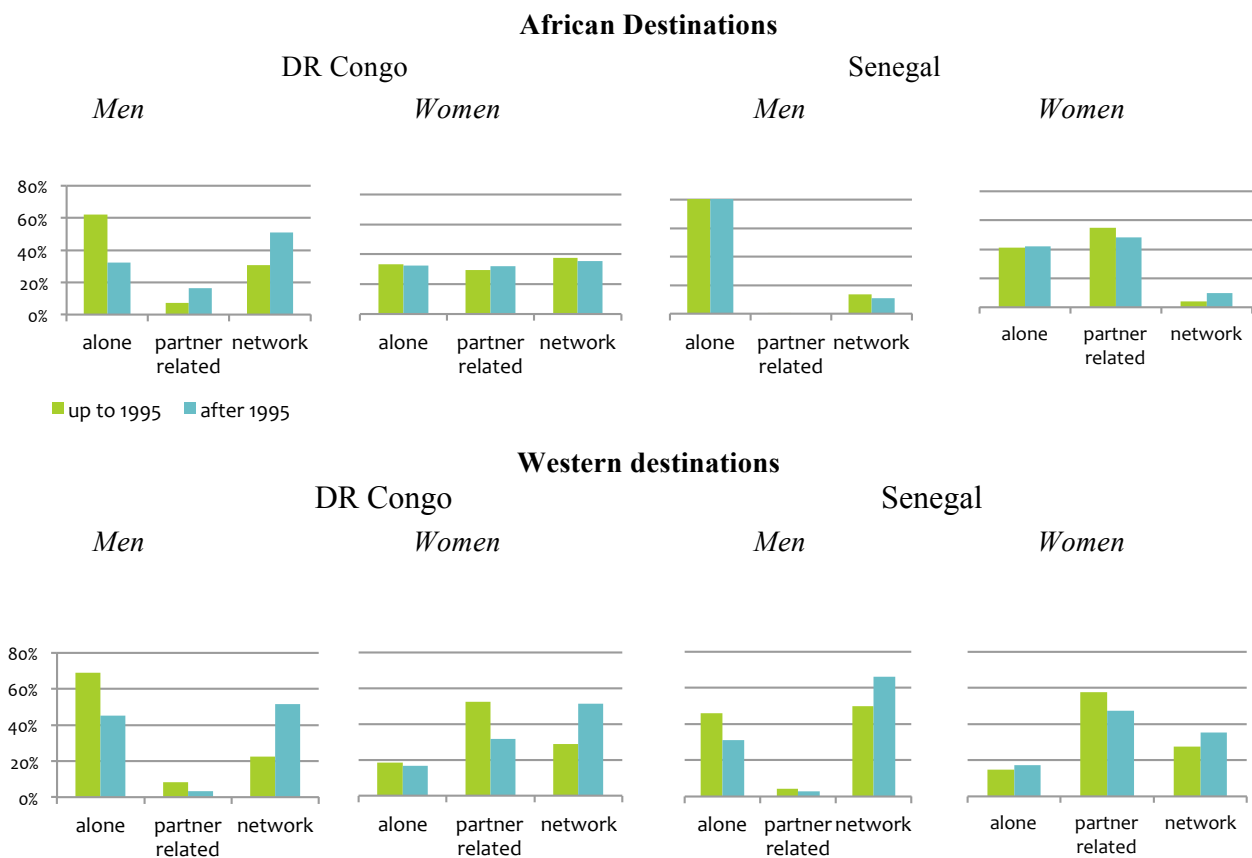
Congolese migrations to other African countries illustrate important gender differences: up to 1995, around 6 out of 10 men migrated to destinations where they had no ties, whereas this was the case for only a third of migrant women. Very few men migrated in relation to their partner (8%) but a much larger proportion of women did so (30%). No change in the nature of female migrations is recorded for intra-continental moves. Female migrations to Western countries display a different pattern: first, the share of women migrating "alone" is much lower than among intra-African moves. Second, the percentage of those moving in relation to their partner has significantly decreased between the two periods. This however translated into an increase in the share of women following other ties at destination, and not of those moving to a destination where they had no connections.

<sup>11</sup> Both formal and informal unions are considered.

This latter aspect also concerns men, and is arguably related to the development of Congolese migration networks.

On the other hand, Senegalese women are, to start with, much more likely to migrate in relation to their partner than the Congolese, and no significant change in the nature of their migration is found. Only a slight – and not statistically significant - decrease in the share of partner-related migrations towards Western destinations can be observed. Again, this is to the benefit of network-related migrations, which increased for both men and women moving to Western countries. A striking difference between intra- and inter-continental Senegalese flows relates to the significance of migrant networks. Few Senegalese moving to an African country report having other ties already present at destination, whereas this concerns a large share of those choosing Western destinations.

**Figure 4 Mode of migration from DR Congo and Senegal by gender and period**



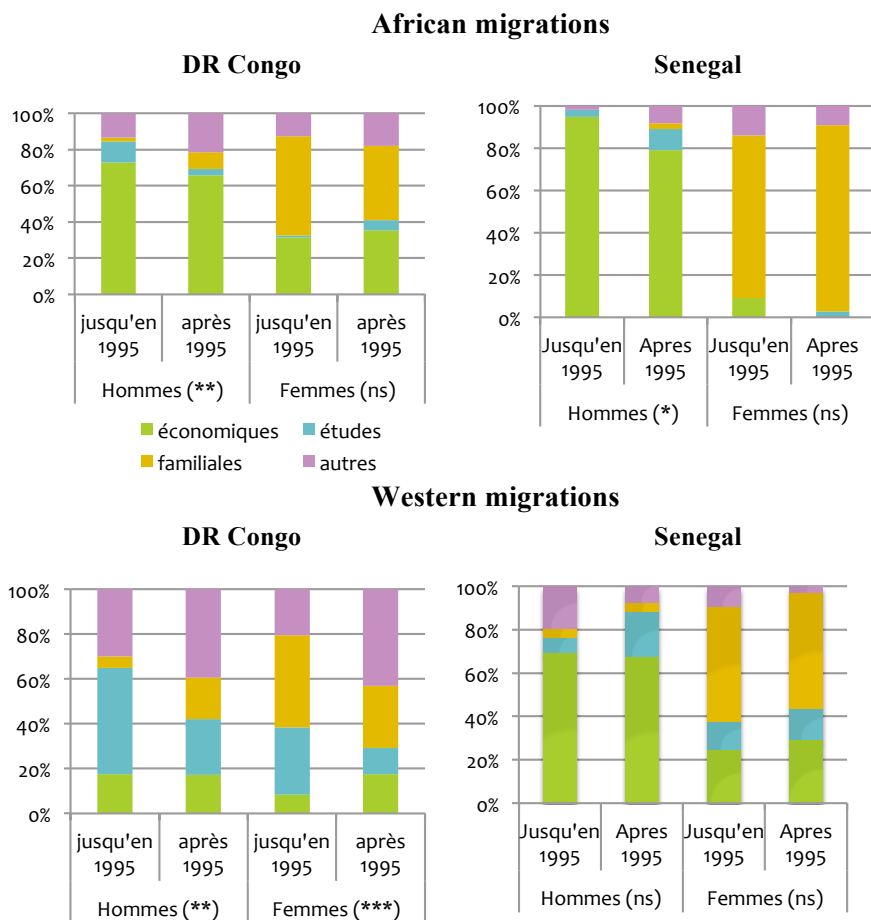
Another aspect considered<sup>12</sup> is the extent of the involvement of other social ties in the decision-making process and the financing of the migrant's trip. A move can be considered more autonomous if it has been individually decided and funded. Findings in both countries show that even when they take place independently of their partner, women's migrations are often the fruit of a collective decision, in which they do not always participate, and this to a larger extent than for men. In this context, it seems that networks (of migrants or of non-migrant kin and friends) play a key role in women's migration process. It is however difficult to evaluate whether their effect is to encourage or, on the contrary to inhibit, women's autonomy.

Last, the autonomous nature of a migration can also be apprehended through the *reasons motivating the move*. Responses from an open-ended question were recoded into four categories:

<sup>12</sup> Results available from the authors

economic, family-related, study and other reasons. Migration motivations show a similar picture: family related reasons are still predominant in female migration flows, especially among the Senegalese. Yet, the importance of economic reasons grew significantly for Congolese female migrations towards Western countries and only very slightly (though not significantly) for intra-continental Congolese moves and Senegalese migrations to Occidental destinations. A modest convergence between male and female migration projects can thus be observed in these flows.

**Figure 5 Reasons to migration from DR Congo and Senegal by gender and period**



## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Trends in female migration from the capital regions of DR Congo and Senegal do not parallel those observed in other regions of the world. No evidence of a substantial feminization of migration flows has been found in either context, and for those destinations where women's migration likelihood has increased, the general structure of gender differences has been preserved as well. Gender gaps have reduced only following a decrease in male migration associated to a stagnation of female mobility. This paper argues that both absolute and relative changes should be considered in order to better evaluate the extent to which flows have feminized.

Findings based on the MAFE data show some evidence of a rise in autonomous female migration from DR Congo, especially towards Western destinations. In contrast, no salient change in this direction can be observed in the Senegalese case. This is based on indicators generally used to assess this phenomenon, such as the reasons motivating the move or the partnership status at the moment of migration. Furthermore, our data allowed us to take into account other social ties besides the partner that are potentially involved in the migration process. Findings showed that while the role

of the spouse in driving female migration has subsided in some cases, the role of other networks has increased, especially in migration towards Western destinations. The share of women moving to countries where they have no connection is much lower than for men and has not increased in recent periods. This leads us to nuance the concept of « autonomous » female migrations and emphasize the blurred nature of the borders between « autonomous » and « associational » migration (Lambert 2001; Coulibaly-Tandian 2007).

Overall, Senegalese women seem less likely to migrate than the Congolese and more likely to do so in association with their partner. Furthermore, whereas some increase in more independent forms of female migration can be noted among the Congolese, no substantial change was found in the Senegalese context. We interpret these differences in light of the more rigid patriarchal system prevailing in Senegal, which constrains women's autonomy with respect to migration but also their participation in the labour market. We argue that a comparative design is necessary in order to better grasp the significance of gender as a socio-cultural construct in migration patterns.

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