Emancipation or Marginalization: the Dilemmas of Aging Gambian Women in Spain

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Introduction

With over 3.7 million immigrants (8.4 percent of the total population), Spain has now overtaken France as the leading host country for the people it classifies as immigrants.[1] For Africans, the country has become a key destination because of its geographic proximity, low costs of living relative to other EU countries, and jobs opportunities. Following the death of Franco in 1975, contingents of Sub-Saharan Africans to arrive as the country sought out low-skilled male workers for industry and large-scale agriculture.[2] Following the recent loss of textile industries in Spain to places like China, the principal source of African immigrant male employment has become agriculture, despite the precarious, undocumented nature of this largely-unskilled, seasonal work. This employment profile tends to draw a particular slice of the African population. In the case of Gambians, it draws many with little or no education.

With sharp increase in migration rates to Europe from developing countries across the world, the most obvious demographic question that arises is whether immigrants will bring their youthful age pyramids to help support Europe's subfertile, aging populations. For immigrants themselves, however, the question is

[1] http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/article.print?id=5702

[2] Detailed historical descriptions of Gambians in Spain are found in accounts such as those of Kaplan Marcusán (1998, ms.), Farjas (2002), and Rodríguez García (2001, 2002). For Africans more generally in rural Spain, see Hoggart and Mendoza (2000).

entirely different: How can one envision a reproductive and family life trajectory across ambiguous political boundaries whose seismic shifts in rules of belonging can so undermine personal security? The answer appears to depend heavily on the immigrant group in question, where it came from, where it lives, and the moment in EU history in which it finds itself. It is possible to begin to discern some common themes, however.

Recent work on fertility among immigrants to Europe has demonstrated that the birth rates of most immigrants from even high fertility countries quickly converge toward those of their new host countries. The Gambian-national population in Spain has surprisingly high fertility rates. With a TFR of 3.67 children per woman for 1996-2000, Gambians resident in a country with one of the lowest fertility rates in the world appear to have one of the highest fertility rates in Europe. Exploring the high fertility anomaly that Gambians appears to pose as an exception to the usual immigrant convergence with local fertility norms, we examined the case of the northern province of Catalonia (Bledsoe, Houle, and Sow, ms.). We relied on several things: exploratory ethnographic fieldwork in Catalonia, the use of the Spanish census and the January 1, 2005 municipal register (both available at www.ine.es, and a consideration of Spanish immigration laws. We found, among other things, high rates of reproduction for short periods of time among an ephemeral population of young women who circulate in marriage across international boundaries.

The present paper turns to another facet of Gambian fertility dynamics in Gambian Spain. It examines the implications of ethnographic report about the replacement, in some cases, of older Gambian wives by younger ones for those wives who find themselves cycled *out* of the marriage networks in the country of immigration. In the case of Gambian women in Spain, we show that "normal" patterns of circulating women in Africa, especially in polygynous unions, become strategies of "substitution," in Europe, sometimes desired by all parties and sometimes not. We examine the implications of this shift for women who have moved beyond the phase of high reproductivity, becoming what Gambians back in Africa might call "old," but in reality is a concept that has little to do with the elapse of time. This notion is much closer to the idea of "wearing out" with use. Hence, "old," particularly for a woman, means something more akin to "worn out" or "spent." The idea is very much like that of *desgastada,* in Spanish, a term that has fallen out of common usage.[3] Among Sub-Saharan Africans, however, the notion of being "spent," whether socially or biologically, is very much on the minds of contemporary women and of the men who married them.

We begin with a conventional overview of some quantitative results. But behind the apparent simplicity of the numbers, we believe, lies a far more complicated story of marriage, migration, and residence that emerges from the brief ethnography we were able to conduct. This fieldwork was short and its results are highly provisional. Evidence is slim, but we find the strength of the ethnographic logic, which to some degree contradicts the numbers, very compelling.

Numerical overview: Gambian nationals in the Spanish census and the municipal register

To sketch the structure of the Gambian immigrant population in Spain, and the legal and marital status of its members, we rely on two official sources. First is the 2001 Census, the latest one available, and the other is the Municipal Register: (the *Padrón).* We use 2002, the year that most closely corresponds to the 2001 Census, and the 2005 Register, because it is the most recent. Spain now makes available both the census and the register at www.ine.es.

[3] Thanks to Anna Cabré for drawing our attention to this word.

The source that more closely reflects legal residents in Spain is likely the Census. The Census is conducted by enumerators who appear at each household to ask who is living there and record the relevant information about the members. The Municipal Register, on the other hand, reflects self-declarations of residence. People who come to a community and wish to partake of services offered by the municipality and the State – health care, social services, schools, and so on – have simply shown some evidence of residence. For immigrants, especially those whose legal status is marginal, the Census tends to underestimate numbers. The Register, on the other hand, tends to overestimate them, particularly in a case like that of Spain, where widespread knowledge of periodic regularization windows has led many would-be immigrants even from other countries to register in hopes of being declared legal the next time an amnesty is announced. A comparison between the 2001 census and the 2002 register may give some idea of how many people, and which sex, are legally resident in Spain, compared with the number who may reside in Spain without legal documents.

Figure 1 shows men in blue and women in red. Individuals recorded in the register are shown in a thick solid line; those in the census are shown with a dashed line. If the census is a more accurate reflection of "legality" and the register simply reflects those who are present, then Figure 1 shows a very close relationship between residence and legality for women at all ages. For men the story is quite different. The figure suggests that there is a close relationship between residence and legality until around age 25. After this point, men who may be residing in Spain without papers are appreciably different until around age 50, when the proportions again converge. Again, this difference among men from 25 to 50 could merely reflect individuals who passed through Spain in order to lay the groundwork for a possible future amnesty. Very likely, however, it suggests some degree of legality.

Figure 1

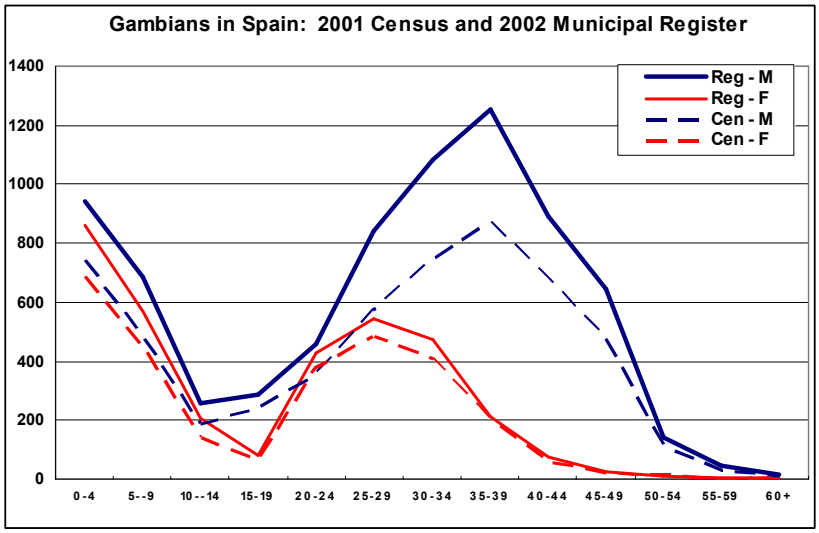


Figure 2 shows the difference between 2002 and 2005 in the register, with the dashed lines showing men and women in 2002 and the solid lines representing 2005. Here, the only group that changed significantly was men between the ages 20 and 40, especially those around 30. This is the group most likely to be migrating alone for work or, perhaps, the most mobile of family members who could be dispatched to register in Spain in case of a future amnesty. Important as well, especially for the present paper, however, is the possibility that the number of older women may be increasing in the register. What the census would show at this point, of course, we cannot know.

Figure 2

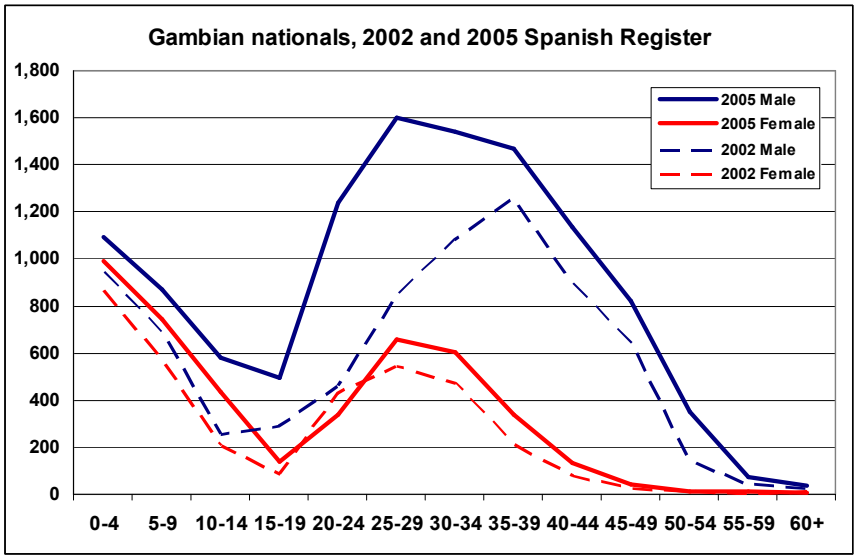
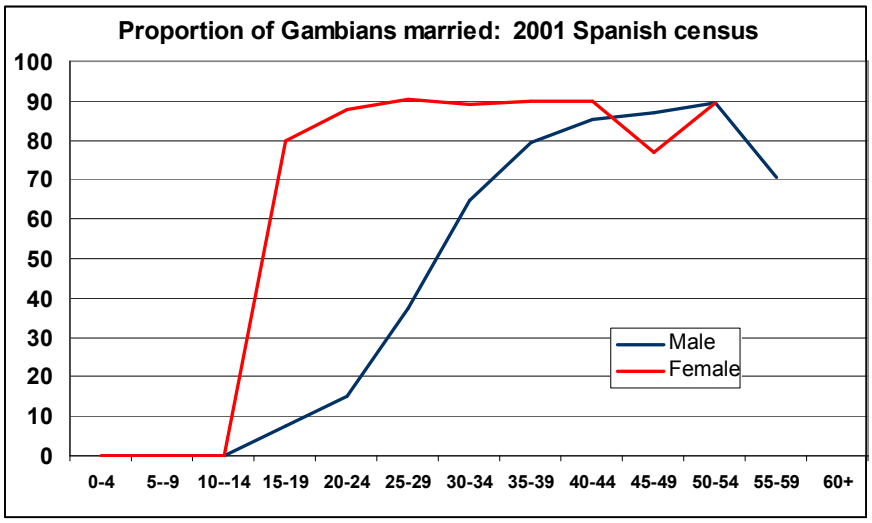


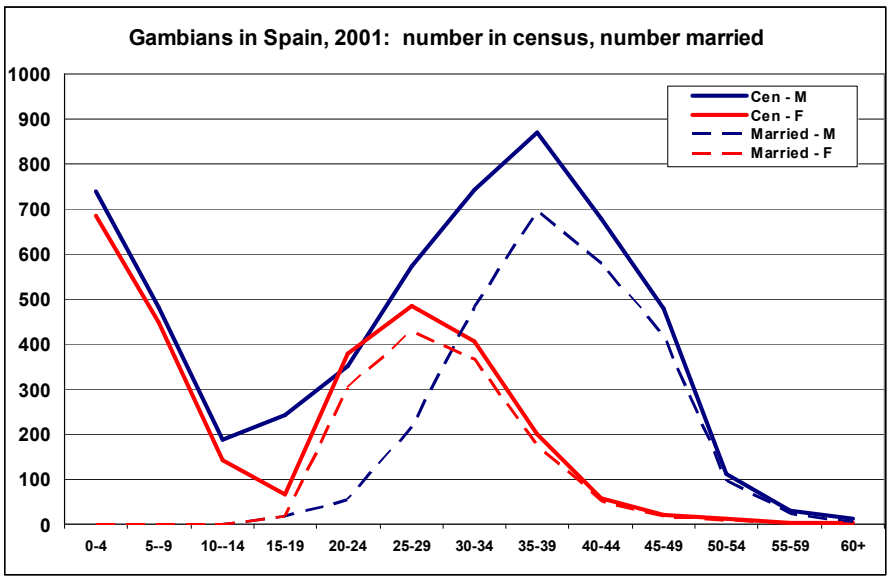
Figure 3 shows proportions of Gambian nationals in the 2001 census by marital status. It shows that 80 percent of Gambian women in Spain, once they reach age 20, say they are married. The proportions of married women reach almost 90 percent by age 25, where they remain almost consistently. Far fewer young men are married. It is not until they reach their early thirties that half are married, and only at 45 do they reach the same very high proportions married as women. These results are very much like what one might see in The Gambia.

Figure 3



As for the relationship between marital status and "legality," reports of marital status are much more closely related to census numbers than to numbers in the register. Figure 4 shows a very close relationship for women of marriageable age (20+) to legality and a more distant one for men until they reach 45.

Figure 4



A close relationship between legality and marriage for Gambian adults makes pragmatic sense at one level. Legal stability as a migrant is what makes a person both desirable as a marriage partner and able to support dependents, especially for men. It is by no means clear, though, that any of these numerical lines represent what they seem to show. It is to a more complicated social story that we now turn.

Gambian immigrants in Spain

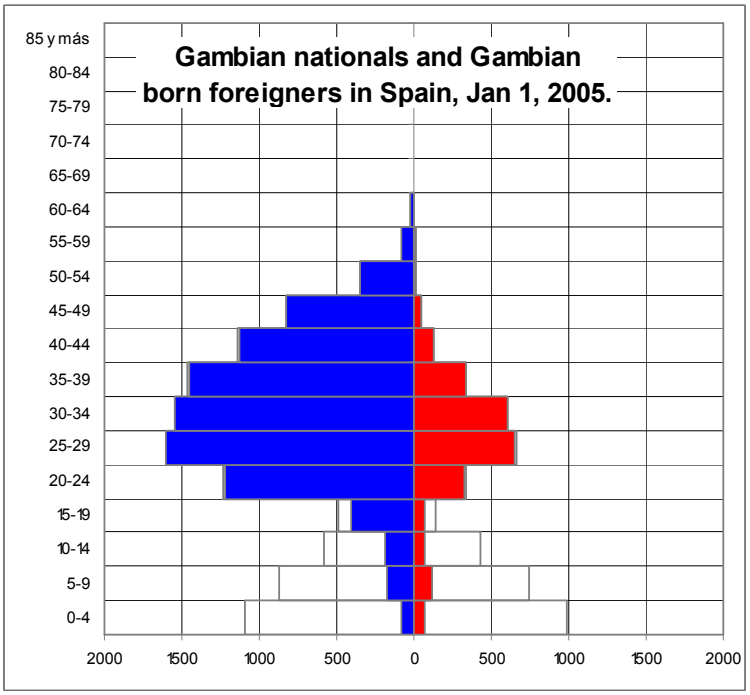
About 90 percent of the Spanish population in January 2005 consisted of individuals born in Spain and having Spanish nationality. For decades, Moroccan-born individuals have had the highest percentage, now 13 percent of the population in Spain, though Ecuador and Columbia have moved up rapidly in the distribution. People born in The Gambia, at .3 percent of the population, are 40th in rank with less than 11,889 individuals, mostly men and non-Spanish citizens.

Many Gambians may see Spain in the long-term: a place to work, gain residency, and raise a family. Like many other Sub-Saharan Africans, they also entertain the yet-more long-term hope of returning to Africa when they retire. Sending home remittances and making visits when possible is aimed to help their families and to ensure a warm welcome from grateful, supportive kin after work life is finished. The hope of returning to a life of honored retirement, however, is often a myth that the harsh realities of immigrant life make impossible to realize (see Kaplan Marcusán 1998:179-81; and Rodríguez García 2004:72-73). With the EU tightening its borders, Gambians without papers who before could have traveled easily between Africa and Spain now encounter enormous odds. They face treacherous crossings over the Straits of Gibraltar, border controls, exorbitant expenses, grueling living and working conditions, and minimal competence in the language and practices of the host country. Many relate a convoluted employment history of precarious, erratic jobs patched together across Africa and Europe, earning barely enough money to stay out of debt, much less send home regular remittances or bring a wife from Africa. With a high adult gender imbalance among eligible conjugal partners in Spain, Gambian men frequently find themselves in dispute over women. For Gambian women, who typically come through reunification,

there are reports of forced marriages,[4] "white marriages" (on-paper only), spousal abuse, and conflicts with unwanted co-wives. Women also run the risk of being sent back to Africa by their husbands, sometimes without their children. Gambian children, to the intense frustration of Spanish school officials, tend to be highly mobile as well, leaving when their fathers take jobs elsewhere (Farjas 2002) or being sent back to Africa for extended periods to see relatives: usually returning at some point, but occasionally not.[5]

Figure 5, a pyramid depicting Gambian nationals and Gambian-born individuals in the most recent municipal register, shows several notable patterns. One is a large number of older men, up to age 49, an unusual feature for a Sub-Saharan group in Spain. This likely reflects both a longer residence in Spain for men who likely came as laborers and the difficulty that African nationals have in attaining Spanish nationality, at which point they would disappear from the Gambian national population and merge with that of Spanish nationals. Compared to the population in The Gambia, there are few Gambian women in Spain, as is typical for unskilled worker populations in Europe, though there are more women from The Gambian than from, say, Senegal and Mali. The most distinctive attribute of this chart, however, is the presence of so many Spanish-born children of Gambian nationality.

Figure 5.



Source: Municipal Register. 1 Jan, 2005

In our earlier paper, we posited several explanations for understanding the bottom of the Gambian pyramid, especially the Spanish-born portion. One was the possibility of adult efforts to gain legal standing through the birth of a Spanish-born child. Another was a kind of "demography of exclusion."[6] That is, apart from Equatorial Guinea, a former Spanish colony, and Guinea [Conakry], all the other Sub-Saharan-origin countries in the top-50 group of immigrant-sending nations (Senegal, Nigeria, Gambia,

[4] The phrase "forced marriage," which Gambians themselves use even in The Gambia, can be misleading in literal translation. Some of these are simply family-arranged marriages between acquiescent partners.
[5] Various observers report ethnic variation in these practices, with the Serahulli allegedly practicing more fosterage and more wife and child substitution than the Fula and Mandinka.
[6] For a parallel discussion, see Domingo and Houle (2005).

Mali, Ghana, Mauretania) have less than four percent Spanish nationality. With the proportion of Gambian-born individuals who have become Spanish nationals at just three percent (www.ine.es), the large number of Spanish-born Gambian children in Spain may represent an accumulation of children who have been born in Spain but are being excluded from nationality,[7] remaining in a kind of naturalization "limbo." Still, this would not explain why the fertility of those who remain Gambian in Spain is apparently so high compared to other immigrant groups. More likely is the possibility of the replication of reproductive life of a high fertility rural African country in a rural area of Europe. A finely tuned vision of African immigrant fertility in Europe would not assume that immigrant groups are literally reproducing traditional fertility practices. We focused instead on the role of Spanish and European policies themselves in driving up these numbers.

In contrast to the opportunities open to more educated Gambians who go to the U.K., many Gambians who come to Spain are not just unskilled but uneducated, a quality that sets them apart not just from many other immigrant groups in Spain but from Gambian immigrants in Britain (Rodríguez García, 2002). Gambian men in Spain might well prefer to live in the city where they can set up a business, and where their wives have better employment opportunities and their children can be exposed to cosmopolitan life. However, they lack of skills in the local language, and encounter prohibitive costs of living in cities for an unskilled immigrant family of modest means and no possibility for a spouse to gain legal employment for five years. Given these constraints, it is perhaps not surprising that there might be a high ratio of Spanish-born children of women of Gambian nationality in the less urban areas of Spain where it is possible to find jobs and raise children affordably. Farm labor and life in the rural areas and regional towns may be as much the result of needs of family formation as the cause. Further, we believe, the sharply limited employment options for this often-undocumented group make it necessary, given the high costs of living in Spain, to keep close and enduring ties with the homeland in order to maintain any stability at all in these highly marginal conditions. Reproductive patterns resembling those of the high-fertility homeland may thus have reappeared among unskilled Africans who accept low-wage jobs in rural or "regional" Spain and, in the case of people from rural Gambians. Through causal routes like these, it is more plausible to believe that people from a high fertility region of the world may have reinstated a high fertility life in a low fertility country.

In a geographical breakdown of fertility rates for Catalonia, where so many Gambian immigrants have settled, we found distinct support for these possibilities. Compared to the age-sex structure for Gambians in the urbanized comarques of Barcelona-Tarragona, the regional comarques of Girona and Lleida, or Lérida showed a significantly larger number of small children. In fact, while fertility for Gambian women in Spain is much higher than for any other immigrant groups, it is significantly higher for Gambian women living in the more rural Girona and Lleida provinces than in Barcelona-Tarragona. The notion of rural-to-rural migration is usually applied to population movement within rural regions of a single country. What these results suggest is an unusual case of rural-to-rural migration of a group whose members have moved mostly from a rural area of Africa to a highly specific rural region of another continent.[8] Together with

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[7] As Rodríguez García (pers. comm.) points out, West Africans (with the exception of those from the Spanish ex-colony Equatorial Guinea) cannot hold double nationality, African and Spanish. Many Africans apparently do not want to lose their African citizenship, meaning that children of these African groups will have to choose one or the other nationality when they come to the age of legal majority.

[8] There is an obvious terminological problem here. Applied to The Gambia, the term "rural" refers to areas that are quite different from what we are calling "rural" in Spain. Here it would include towns where farm managers and workers dominate, but it would also include *las cercanías*, "surroundings; outlying regions," with municipalities like Girona which contain complex areas with major economic resources in services, tourism and the building sector. Still, population density in these areas is far lower than in Barcelona, as are the costs of housing and food. Available as well are jobs in agriculture, despite its often-exploitive character, even if the work is quite different from what they did in The Gambia.

the rural base that Girona and Lleida represent, the fertility of Gambians here may more closely approximate a "maturing rural African community."[9]

Even more provocative, however, is another potential facet of the demography of exclusion: what might be called a "re-entry deterrence" hypothesis. The large number of children may also reflect an even more indirect causal pathway: an accumulation of children by families who have hesitated to send children back to Africa because of policies that place increasing restrictions on the free movement of persons. Families worry about health risks for children, especially from infectious diseases such as malaria. Spain may be expensive and politically intimidating to Gambians resident in Spain, but no one questions the health advantages for children in Spain. What Africans have begun to fear at least as much, however, are the increasing re-entry difficulties posed by Spanish immigration authorities (see Massey, 2005, for important insights into the dynamics of re-entry deterrence). Many Gambians would prefer to circulate between Africa and Europe, but Spain continually raises the financial and legal stakes for re-entry. For families of small, insecure means, risking their livelihood or even their lives to make the trip across the Straits of Gibralter hardly seems a choice. Paradoxically, then, Spain's well-known – indeed, highly publicized -- exclusionary efforts to restrict entry may well be creating an accumulation of Gambian children who are kept within it. As the question becomes less one of what is to gain by coming than what is to lose by going, the fertility figures in Spain may not reflect not only high fertility but also the paradoxical dynamics of child accumulation as an artifact of Spanish law itself. The question here would be less one of what is to gain by coming, than what is to lose by going.

In sum, applied to a particular West African reproductive regime, the logic encoded in Spanish laws of family reunification and passage across the international boundary, in combination with the rising efforts to thicken the wall of exclusion from Africa, itself appears to generate a particular new demographic regime in Europe.

The phenomenon we explore here turns on the possibility that the apparent rates of high fertility are also an artifact of another form of the demography of exclusion: the implications of patterns of "selection" for older Gambian women. Coming for short periods of time, through historically specificied reunification schemes, this highly selected, ephemeral population of women effectively becomes a rotating pool of women who may circulate in marriage across international boundaries. With men trying to select *in* young women as wives to a country with strong codes of monogamy, what happens to older women who face the same re-entry problems?

The circulation of people in the Afro-Iberian corridor

Spain was one of the most formidable colonial powers in history, generating centuries of migration, through commerce, conquest, education, and missionization, to the New World, Asia, and the rest of Europe. Well before the twentieth century began, the country became a labor exporter, its economy deflated by the loss of its colonial holdings, based largely on agriculture. Scholars of Spanish migration history have traced Spain's dramatic reversal, from a "sending" country to a "receiving" one, during the last quarter of the twentieth century, to several things, among which the most important was probably the demise of the deeply conservative government of Generalissimo Francisco Franco. With Franco's death in 1975, manufacturing, tourism, industry and large-scale agriculture opened up, and with them, a demand for low-cost labor. Young Spanish citizens, however, much preferred skilled jobs and life in urban and industrial areas. To add to the economic complications, the end Franco-era bans on contraception and divorce brought about a decisively drop in fertility: from 3.0 in 1964, the TFR declined to 1.4 by 1994 (Miret 2000). By the time Spain entered the European Union in 1986, its farms and businesses began

[9] Thanks to Andreu Domingo for the details of this clarification.

actively to seek to labor for unskilled jobs in manufacturing and farming. The country has thus transformed from a country that exported its young labor into a destination country for fresh, cheap labor to supply its booming economy.

Catalonia, with its industry, farming, and geographic proximity to the rest of the EU, has become the economic powerhouse of Spain. The seacoast has harbors, fisheries, a large service sector, and a booming tourist trade especially in Barcelona, the Community's capital.[10] Major industries in the recent past have included chemicals and the manufacture of automobiles, airplanes, trains, and metal items. Clothing and textiles, the former principal money earners for the Community, have gone into decline with the opening of global markets to China, leaving agriculture the backbone industry. Catalonia produces cereals, potatoes, maize, olives, grapes, and a significant proportion of the country's wines. In recent years, a number of organic farms and commercial greenhouses, *invernaderos,* have sprung up to grow food and flowers for Spanish cities and for the EU market just across the border. Catalonian agriculture, like that of Spain as a whole, is heavily reliant on low-cost seasonal labor of the kind that many Gambians and other Africans now provide.

On the wider European scene, the Schengen agreement of 1985 opened free passage to citizens of EU member countries and allowed short stays for citizens of non-member countries, following a legitimate entry into one of the signatory countries. With respect to non-EU citizens, Schengen, together with the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999), sought to restrict EU entry. Given Spain's geographical proximity to Africa, however, the country became a point of attempted transit for many immigrants to the rest of the EU, where they could travel more freely. The EU has exerted enormous pressure on Spain to control the flow of migrants at its borders. Some African immigrants drew fair and decent conditions. However, those who were undocumented tended to work in arduous, underpaid, precarious agricultural jobs in southern Spain, moving from one seasonal job to the next.

Although immigrants like these have drawn antipathy in Spain, their plights have also drawn concern. In 1985 the first major Spanish law on migration policy was enacted: the *Ley de Extranjería*, the Law on the Rights and Freedoms of Foreigners in Spain (Migration Policy Institute (http://www.migrationpolicy.org). In 1996, an amendment to the law recognized that foreigners had rights to education, equality, and legal counsel, and it established a permanent resident category. This amendment also incorporated an allowance for family reunification, with the evolution of a specific configuration of policies governing family reunification ("*reagrupament familiar").* The law allows reunification for families of African nationals with Spanish residency permits only for spouses, dependent children under 18 years old, and dependent parents of a foreign national. Such people must have proof of their relationship with the family member and proof that he/she can provide for them in Spain.[11] Spain requires ten years of residence to apply for naturalization. Few opportunities are available for skilled workers or students, so most immigrants seeking permanency in Spain come through asylum or illegally, hoping to regularize to gain legal status (http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/2002_02_22.php). The implementation of these accords, however, has been uneven, and these policy measures, like others, have been used to exclude as well as to include. There has been a 5-year ban on employment for an immigrant's spouse brought legally through reunification, for example, a measure that largely seems to have increased participation in a thriving underground domestic economy among women who engage in low-paid labor in cleaning and caring for children and the elderly (Kaplan Marcusán 1998; Sow 2004b; Martínez Veiga, 1999).

[10] See Cabré (1999) for a description of the dynamics of reproduction in urban Catalonia. For discussions of immigrant dynamics in urban Catalonia, see Domingo et al. (1995) and Domingo et al. (2002). For discussions of immigrants in the surrounding comarques, see Domingo and Brancos (1996).

[11] http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Parliament/4327/ppascr16.htm, accessed March 6, 2006.

With its need for both labor and contributions to its social security systems, Spain has offered four amnesties in the last two decades. The last, and most comprehensive of these, ending in May 2005, granted nearly 700,000 employed workers legal residence.[12] The aim particularly in the last amnesty was to undermine the black market in exploited labor, and to increase the employer share of contributions to workers' social security and health benefits. For those immigrants who qualified, this last amnesty gave them more rights, not the least of which was the freedom to travel more freely both within and out of the country. However, it also tied security explicitly to a legal job contract, leading some employers to fire workers before the amnesty window arrived so they would not have to pay benefits. The new measures, in tying the security of dependents tightly to the job of one person, may have intensified the vulnerability of women and children to being sent home by the wage earner or even to abuse. The evolving corpus of rules has also had more subtly distorting effects on marriage and reproduction. To understand these effects, we first need to examine some common elements of reproductive regimes in West Africa.

Elements of West African political and reproductive regimes

Three key domains in West African social and reproductive life -- marriage, the production of children, and the founding and settlement of a political frontier – are key modes through which relations take place across the Afro-Iberian divide. All stem from, and all generate, flux in time and space.

The movement that marriage generates is one of the most prominent features of all classic ethnographies of Africa. For a man, marriage is the first step toward both reproductive life and a political career (Clignet 1970). In most African societies, however, it is the woman who leaves her home to come to that of the man. A wife is expected to keep the home, work on the family farm, earn income through petty trading, provide hospitality for important visitors, and bear children who will propagate her husband's identity and honor. A woman, for her part, may marry soon after puberty, typically moving to the husband's home and beginning childbearing shortly after. A young wife sees children as the key to security in her husband's home to forestall competition from present or future co-wives. She may try to bear a series of children as quickly as possible without risking their health and her own. At some point, however, she becomes physically "spent" from her reproductive exertions, regardless of her chronological age. The traumas of repeated pregnancies under difficult medical conditions can wear out, or "age," her body rapidly, rendering her physically "old." For each subsequent pregnancy, she runs severe health risks. Normally, a woman does not mind "aging" from repeated births if the man honors her reproductive achievements by allowing her, if he believes she has is deserving, to "retire" from childbearing and to stay in the home or return, if she wishes, to her natal family. The acquisition of a younger co-wife to continue the household's flow of children may in fact be her ticket to an honored retirement. Although a man may use his wife's "aging" as an excuse to marry a new woman, many older women in rural West Africa strongly desire a co-wife. Indeed, a husband who does not bring home a new co-wife to take over the productive and reproductive burdens for a faithful wife who is worn out from childbearing may come home one day to find she has gone out and secured one for him anyway. (See Bledsoe 2002, on the intertwined politics of polygyny and aging.)

Jealousies among co-wives and charges of male favoritism can be sources of bitter tension in polygynous households (Randall and LeGrand 2003, Lardoux and van de Walle 2003), and a man may use his wife's "aging" as an excuse to marry a new woman. In practice, however, much depends on how many children she has borne, how loyal he perceives her to have been, and the availability of a younger co-wife to continue having children for him. Rates of polygyny appear to be declining in Africa, with education and

[12] A number of registrants, however, were said to come from other parts of Europe, seeking the legitimacy that would allow them to live and travel within and out of Europe, by Schengen terms, and leaving as soon as they obtained it.

urbanization, and a number of countries have formally banned the practice. But sub-rosa polygyny continues to flourish across the sub-continent in the forms of informal plural unions among residentially separate partners (Locoh 1994) and the acquisition of young partners by "sugar daddies" (Dinan 1983). (See also Parkin and Nyamwaya (1987), Sargent and Cordell (2003), and Fleischer (2005).) Comaroff and Roberts (1977), for example, in their classic article on "serial monogamy" in southern Africa, refer to men taking on multiple conjugal relationships in a sequence instead of simultaneously, yet retaining some degree of conjugal connection to all of them and their children as well as their extended families. An engrossing parallel is found in the treatises of Jacob Coker (1913), a nineteenth and twentieth century Nigerian Christian clergymen who argued with fellow Christians that for a man who married a new wife, cutting marital ties to one's first wife merely because she was old would be a morally reprehensible act. What is crucial to note as well about marriage is that women sometimes arrange marriages of other women, just like men do. In most cases these are women who have "aged," or become "worn out," usually through acts of childbearing. In a position of honor, they now become active participants in decisions regarding the marriages of younger women and also of men.

Like the marriage practices that move women, fostering practices create enormous mobility among children. Legal adoption is almost unheard of, but fostering out children to live with relatives, friends, or teachers is regarded not only as normal but advantageous for both children and their families. Families enact fostering arrangements for education, apprenticeship, ritual initiation, Arabic instruction, or household help, or simply to gain assurance of future reciprocity among a wide kin network. Even small children in West Africa are often sent to a grandmother for several years, either because they are ready for weaning and the mother is ready to begin a new pregnancy, or because the parents need to work. So commonplace is the practice of fostering that the same parents whose own children are away may be taking care of other people's children. In fact, with the exception of grandmothers, who are notorious for spoiling children, outside guardians are sometimes said to be better disciplinarians than parents: more willing to instill children with fortitude to steel them to difficulties in the future (Goody, 1973; Bledsoe, 1990).

Men of course move as well, most notably to look for work, especially when it is time to marry. Young African men often leave home for long periods to work for bridewealth to secure rights to a woman's labor and reproduction (e.g., Enel et al. 1994, for the Joola of Senegal). Among the most interesting forms of mobility precipitated usually by men is the phenomenon of settling a "frontier." Political incorporation is a longstanding theme in the African ethnography (e.g., Shack and Skinner et al. 1979), emerging vividly in oral histories of the founding and settlement of a new "frontier" (Kopytoff 1987). In Liberia (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987), oral histories of a polity typically depict a first-comer/founder's act of exploring an unknown new land, securing it from enemies and dangerous ritual forces, renaming it to symbolically establish its new identity, and clearing it for farming. Acquiring a wife to work on the farm and bear children, this founder begins to strike allegiances with newcomers seeking similar security, assigning them territorial sub-domains to administer, and giving them one of his daughters or sisters – or a client's daughter or sister -- in marriage. He can also give them a woman from a client's family – a woman who is effectively his daughter. Through the relationships it creates between the two families in the present and particularly the next anticipated generation, such a marriage creates a perpetual matrilateral line of subordinate "nephews" or "newcomers" to the original "uncles" or founders. In later years, subsequent newcomers may be placed under the jurisdiction of the original nephew, receiving further sub-domain to consolidate from the original newcomer – and now himself part of the "founder" hierarchy -- and women to marry. In turn, he may receive new members who are as insecure as he was, and he himself becomes a patron ("elder," "firstcomer," "uncle," etc.) to those who come later, in this new "immigrant frontier." For them he may mediate papers, wives, and jobs. The result is a nested political structure knit together

by the idioms of marriage, kinship, and territorial expansion and consolidation.[13] Circumstances like these vividly remind us that any conception of "family formation" as the outcome of free choice by a couple detached from a social and political milieu is misguided, regardless of which society we are describing.

The notion of frontier of course connotes expansive untamed rural wilderness to Western audiences. But the process of carving a "civilized" territory anew out of a frontier extends to urban settings as well: places where many previous people who call themselves founders and their followers have lived for some time. Barnes' (1987) study of the rise to power, from the marginal migrant ranks, of a new local government in Mushin, Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s, details the process by which a narrower group supplanted its rivals, took over the ranks of chiefly authority and replaced the ranks of chiefly titleholders with newcomers, who fictionalized themselves into "traditional" authority. The study is notable for many reasons. Not the least is that this occurred in the most urbanized area of Mushin, a suburb of Lagos, the biggest city in Nigeria: itself the most urbanized country in Sub-Saharan Africa. A "frontier," in sum, can comprise not just unexplored, untouched lands, but fully inhabited named urban areas with complex social orders and deeply entrenched histories. All lies in the eyes – and agendas – of the newcomers.

Taking issue with Frederick Jackson Turner's famous thesis, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History,"[14] which described the frontier as a "tabula rasa" space in which old ways could be cast off and fresh beginnings struck, Kopytoff (1987) argued that in the African frontier, polities tend to be patterned on former structures of kinship, ritual life, and historical genres. Past patterns are never replicated simply because of past practices, and they almost never transfer intact. As we will see, however, marriage, fostering, and patronage idioms implied in the notion of settling and consolidating a political frontier appear to provide key resources – political, economic, cultural -- by which Gambians have rebuilt elements of Africa to establish themselves in Spain, with its daunting world of employers, landlords, and civil bureaucracy.

Settling the Gambian immigrant frontier in Spain

The problems that immigrants confront can be illustrated by describing the formal steps toward regularization for an African worker (assuming a man) and his family. The trajectory includes registering at the Civil Government to get a residence permit (what people refer to as "papers"), getting a job contract, and applying for family reunification. Each, for an African, is a formidable undertaking. Of particular importance is the job contact, which gives a man the right to apply for a work permit and for a health insurance card, a social security card, and a residence permit. It also persuades his landlord that he can pay his rent. All this an immigrant must have in place to move to town and bring a wife and children. But getting a job in Spain, like everything else, requires the careful cultivation of patronage networks, staying in good stead with thick layers of friends of friends, whether by payments or favors or, in some case, providing a wife. A prospective worker must be well positioned, in case a Spanish employer needing laborers suddenly asks an employee to mine his networks for job candidates and help negotiate the terms

[13] Similar patterns and their linguistic indicators emerge throughout Africa. In the languages of The Gambia, linguistic terms link superordinance with territorial precedence and with matrilateral kinship. In Serahulli, from eastern Gambia, *hiiri* means "old persons," "experienced persons," "firstcomers;" in Wollof, there is *"diatigui"* ("elders," "experienced," "firstcomers," "uncles") vs. *"dahar"* ("youth," newcomers," "latecomers," "nephews"). See also Sow, (2004a).

[14] American Historical Association; 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago.

of their work (Pau Baizan, pers. comm.).[15] In sum, migrants rely on connections, persistence, and sheer luck on the road to regularization.

With spiraling immigration and employment challenges, it should not be surprising that how African immigrants describe their difficulties in coming to Spain and attempting to "regularize" their status (*regularizarse)* bears clear resemblance to how they describe settling a frontier in Africa. Among the most striking, at least to an outsider, is that of "renaming" elements of Spanish geography – a town, a neighborhoods, and even Spain itself – often in the names of those Africans who first "settled" them just decades ago. In this new immigrant frontier, however, the acquisition of papers becomes the consummate prize around which relationships of kinship, ritual, and precedence arise. Needed is the intervention of a broker who speaks the local languages (in the case of Catalonia, both Spanish and Catalan), already has papers, knows sympathetic officials and humanitarian groups, and is familiar with both the formal rules of the system as well as the strategies that allow one to maneuver within it. Such an individual can help a newcomer to grapple with tasks that a Spanish citizen would find quite ordinary such as finding a place to stay and eat, not to mention negotiating a job, getting papers, and trying to grasp the mysteries of an utterly foreign language. (See Sow 2004a, on the parallel efforts by Senegalese traders in Spain to become established.) He can also help them to bring their own dependents, though there is usually an expectation of payment, currently said to range from three to four thousand euros for time, expenses, and risk. Each newcomer who manages to establish himself by obtaining a job, papers, a flat, and a wife, in turn becomes a patron/uncle to subsequent newcomers, helping them to get their own jobs and papers, and to bring their wives and dependents from Africa.

Gambians in Europe: From circulation to substitution

The intensity of the financial and legal hurdles that Africans face, together with testimonies from those we talked to, suggests that the Gambian model of social reproduction in Spain has been pressed from one of relatively "normal" circulation of people toward one of substitution. If this is so, then the intertwined logics of polygyny and aging may change dramatically in the context of international migration in contemporary Spain.

Any attempt, however, to comprehend these results for Gambians in Spain must be read as pragmatic responses by Gambians in Spain to the legal ban on having more than one spouse at a time and the less-than-18 age boundary for bringing children under family reunification policy. It must also keep in view the tenuous hold on subsistence and the tightening restrictions face on both family reunification and their prospects for re-entry, financial and legal, if they leave the country. Above all, is the need to keep in view the elements of West African ethnography on the circulation of people that we described earlier.

Children

In Gambian Spain, parents who would have circulated their children freely to relatives and grandmothers to contend with the demands of sporadic work at odd hours are now themselves the only available caretakers. This means that children are sometimes circulated among households, depending on where care is available.

Local reports also suggest that those children represented in the Gambian age-sex pyramid in Spain may in some cases be the "own children" of the man in the household, but they are not necessarily the "own"

[15] This suggests that the nature of labor recruiting itself can produce immigration streams from specific places, especially as local labor markets become transnational (for analogous discussions, see Sassen, 1995). See also Krissman's (2005) observation that immigrant networks that include employers.

children of the household's women, as virtually most methods of calculating fertility assume. Whose children, then, are they?

The regularity of the Spanish-born base of the Gambian pyramid itself strongly suggests that these numerous children actually were born in Spain, and that most are probably the "own children" of the man in the household. Beyond that, however, lies much uncertainty. Very likely most are the children of the man and his high parity wives in Spain. Alternatively, they may be the children of a woman who returned to Africa when the man brought a new wife. Or they may be the children of a wife of a polygynous man returned who returned to Africa to breastfeed a new baby, while another wife arrived, ready for a new pregnancy after her own child reached the age of weaning and could be left behind with the grandmother.

All of these "man's own children" configurations would be quite legitimate, according to African classificatory kinship practices, in which all children of a man – and also of his brothers -- are expected to call all his in-married wives, out of respect, "mother." They would also be quite legitimate under the technicalities of Spanish reunification policies Spain may ban polygyny, but it does not ban the children by polygynous unions, Spanish or otherwise.

Other cases might begin to raise official questions. Some children in Gambian immigrant households may be those of parents who are not living in the household: fostered children, especially those brought from Africa. Indeed, throughout his stay in Spain, a man from Africa faces enormous pressure to provide for the family back home, whether by sending money or by helping others to come and go for work to help shoulder the burden. Bringing anyone at all, however, whether in family reunification or otherwise, has become a daunting financial and legal proposition. Spanish reunification laws extend to only a narrow range of people a man would call "family." Specifically excluded are a second wife and other people's children with whom he or one of his wives has been entrusted in fostering arrangements. One of the ways a man may do this is by using the name of a child in the man's passport,[16] which commonly contains the name of under-age children, together with their gender, age, and place of birth. Since no one compares the number of children entering under a parent's passport with the number leaving, a man may substitute children of the same gender and approximate age as his own as he passes through Spanish border control.

Overall, however, most children born in Spain appear to stay there, except for brief visits back home, regardless of where their mothers eventually go: a view supported by people's descriptions as well as by the regularity of the Spanish-born base of the Gambian immigrant pyramid. If substitutions are in play, therefore, they probably involve women.

Women

Any explanation for Gambian family structure in Spain must confront the dynamics of a multiplicity of selective forces. Legal immigration slots are now extremely valuable. A man may select out from his household an older woman who is nearing the end of reproduction, and even send her back in order to bring a younger woman. A Gambian man in Spain may send a wife back to Africa without divorcing her, and use her papers to bring in another wife. Whereas men tend to adopt an "accumulation" strategy for children, they seem to adopt a replacement strategy with women, substituting older wives with a continuing cycle of young ones. Women thus continue to be chosen – selected *in* to the migratory stream -- explicitly on the basis of their marriage and reproductive potentials and selected *out* when they declare themselves, or others declare them, to be "old." Indeed, although Gambian women have higher fertility

[16] Farjas (2002), whose thesis focuses on children being sent back to The Gambia to stay with relatives, refers briefly to children sent to Spain to join their immigrant parents or relatives. She describes this as a relatively new practice, an observation that makes sense in that family reunification became possible only in the mid-1990s.

than women in Spain, some evidence suggests they complete their reproductive life much earlier than Spanish women who now delay bearing their 1.3 children to finish their education and start a career, and possibly earlier also than in The Gambia. Women in Kaplan Marcusán's (1998) sample from Girona, for example, seemed to stop bearing children around age 30.

In theory a man could legally bring a second wife as long as he only had one wife at a time in Spain. The fact that Gambian women hope for an honored "retirement" from childbearing means that returning to Africa to be with their families may be exactly what many would like. And given the advantages for children of remaining in Spain as well as the widespread acceptability of fosterage itself, women may also prefer to leave their Spanish-born children in the care of the husband and his new wife rather than take them back to Africa.

Numerous factors militate against this scenario, however. Men feel intense pressure from home to maintain a steady production of children and to circulate people. Given the stiffening risks for re-entry attempts imposed by Spanish reunification policies, a new "substitution" logic emerges: one that emphasizes permanent immigration "slots," rather than the free circulation of individuals. To fill these "slots" with appropriate people, a man may select out an older wife as she approaches the end of reproductive capacity, moving her to the edges of official visibility as a kind of housekeeper in his household or into the household of someone else. He may also send her back – "remigrate" her -- to Africa, replacing her with a new wife who is selected *in* to the same population in Spain for her youthful fecundity.[17] Because of the difficulty in incorporating family members in reunification now, these slots tend to be reserved rather than given up in favor of starting again with a new household member. Either the first or the second wife, therefore, may be unreported in the official record. Some children in Gambian households in Spain thus appear to be those of women who remain in Spain, marginalized in the man's household and unreported in the official documents; other appear to be children of older wives who were compelled to return home against their wishes so the man could take a new wife.

Some men do not send back older wives, however. They instead bring a young wife under the name of a daughter. A man may also give such a young woman to a young man who needs help in bringing a wife. Recalling the ethnography above, however, this girl, in African terms, truly is his daughter *socially*, regardless of her biological relationship to him, just as the young man for whom he brings her is now, socially, his "nephew." In transactions sounding remarkably like those characterizing landowner/firstcomer relations in West Africa, the older man's act of helping a younger man, whether to get papers or to bring a wife, creates a hierarchical relation of patron-client/firstcomer-latecomer/uncle-nephew, whatever terminology is appropriate in the conversational moment. While children appear to stay and women to return permanently to Africa, noticeably blurring in all cases are the lines dividing own children, foster children, and wives.

The mix of legal strictures and economic necessity in Spain, then, overlaid on strong and continuing ties of patronage and kinship to a West African reproductive regime, appears to have led to a growing accumulation of Spanish-born children who remain in Spain in the wake of multiple acts of wife

[17] Notably, however, many of their age peers who end up in the UK -- and ironically some of those who remain in The Gambia -- can continue pursuits such as formal education. Kaplan Marcusán (1998:165-66) describes the case of a young Gambian woman who came to a reproductive health clinic in Spain requesting an abortion. She had been trying to pursue her education in The Gambia, but was withdrawn from school by her parents to marry a Gambian man in Spain who was 20 years her senior. Her strategy in requesting the abortion was to appear feign sterility so the husband would send her home to The Gambia, where she could continue her studies. The irony, of course, is marked. The opportunities a place represents are clearly relative to the circumstances of the individuals who arrive, meaning that for some, Africa may represent better prospects for education than Spain. .

substitution, or children of other parents who are being brought from The Gambia under the guise of reunification with the man's own children.[18] The result may be either an overstated numerator, in the form of an accumulation of children of the same man by more than one wife, or an understated denominator, in the form of an unreported second wife, as wives return to Africa or remain at the edges of legitimacy in Spain – or both. The need to circulate people to and from opportunity within the restrictions posed by the rules encoded in Spanish law itself, applied to a particular West African reproductive regime, combined with the well-founded concerns about restriction on movement, may have generated the high ratio of Spanish-born children of women of Gambian nationality in Spain, through the particular forms of exclusion. It also appears to have spawned a cultural repertoire of "substitution" practices with women. The accumulation of children of multiple women in the numerator, and a fluid exchange of women in the denominator,[19] appears to result in a high ratio of Spanish-born children of women of Gambian nationality in Spain.

While denominator dynamics may well contribute to the high proportion of Spanish-born Gambian children per woman in Spain, the relative contribution of this factor is difficult to estimate because the numbers and roles of marginalized wives is so difficult to estimate. What is clear, however, is that various forms of sub-rosa polygyny – informal plural unions among residentially separate partners, rapid spousal turnover among serially monogamous men, etc – flourish transnationally. Whether these women go back to The Gambia or remain in Spain, and whether wife exchange is voluntary or involuntary, and whether wives are allowed to remain at the edges of official visibility in Spain, these tensions, in a heightened legal context, appear to intensify the turnover among women of marriageable age.

Implications for aging immigrant women

In contrast to the prospects of life in Africa, older immigrant women in Spain who are regarded by their husbands as "worn out," whether in the sense of being socially isolated or biologically spent from childbearing, become vulnerable on multiple fronts. As in Africa, they are vulnerable to the charms of a desirable young wife who may seek to dominate the attentions of the husband. Now, however, older women are also vulnerable to the strength of European laws of monogamy – laws that effectively become policies of exclusion for African families -- that bar the presence of supportive adult children. In effect, the difficulty that families encounter in sustaining a truly polygynous life in the face of strong European laws of monogamy arguably renders the conjugal status of "older" Gambian wives in Spain more vulnerable than they were in Africa to abuse or neglect, or even to being sent home involuntarily, in favor of a new wife. Older women who have been subfertile (and hence have remained below the vision of the formal system) and those who take a stand of opposition against their husbands seem especially vulnerable to being substituted for a younger, more docile, reproductively active woman.

The marginalism -- the loneliness and possibly even the 'forced individualism' -- to which divorced or marginalized women are sometimes subjected means that they may be more able to operate according to

[18] Farjas (2002), whose thesis focuses on children being sent back to The Gambia to stay with relatives, refers briefly to children sent to Spain to join their immigrant parents or relatives. She describes this as a relatively new practice, an observation that makes sense in that family reunification became possible only in the mid-1990s.

[19] This speculation would be commensurate with the observation of Farjas (2002:290) that Gambian immigrants in Spain – particularly women – live in a precarious "provisional reality" (see also Kaplan, ms.). In Spain, most Gambian women have no citizenship, they do not speak the language, and can be sent home any time by either Spanish authorities or by the man who brought them and who has primary rights in any children they produce. See also Solsona et al. (2003) for an insightful treatment of the connection between reproductive and marital life in Senjegal and reproductive health among Senegalese immigrants in Spain.

"free choice." But this very quality of individuals often means that they are marginalized by other Gambians with strong links with African networks. In the migration context, older African women who have circulated out of a marriage seem out of control according to the conventions by which Africans often assess themselves.

The logic that emerges, then, suggests that the very strength of Spanish laws themselves– laws governing spousal numbers and reunification possibilities – creates certain effects that we might otherwise attribute to continuing "tradition" from Africa. In this case, it renders older, possibly "*desgastada,"* Gambian women vulnerable to efforts by husbands to marginalize them. It also effectively "selects out" older women from the "legitimate" Gambian immigrant population in Spain, whether these forces of selection occur at the wishes of these women or despite their resistance, and whether the women leave Spain or move to the edges of official visibility in the official records. The numbers, given the marginal legality of some of these moves, are impossible to ascertain, but the intensity of the financial and legal hurdles that Africans face appears to have pressed the Gambian cultural model of marriage in Spain toward a new extreme.

But although there appears to be substantial transnational turnover among women who are "selected out" of the country as they stop having children, there is a small but distinctive type of older Gambian woman in Catalonia who is said to be "emancipated." This is so especially among those with Spanish-born children, since the plight of immigrant children draws the attention of NGOs, many of them funded by the Spanish government itself. Such a woman may even actively seek the assistance of NGOs and government services to free herself from her husband and retain her rights to stay.

Women in this group may suffer social isolation and become marginalized by "traditional" networks. But those women who remain in Spain – and not all do, of course, -- may also become emancipated, taking up a life in Spain that is independent of the husband who turned them out by beginning to incorporate themselves in their older years with new facets of their European surroundings. Taking jobs with NGOs or with social and health services themselves, those women who remain in Spain, now having legal residence, may enter the labor market and become brokers for new waves of immigrant women who face many of the same problems they did. They may even take up new efforts to circulate people themselves, very much as older women in Africa do, and begin to arrange the marriages of young men and women who enter the system as low-status clients and wives, very much as they themselves did. As in Africa, this is no simple story of the exploitation of women by men.

Discussion

For some time, the "anthropology of the body" has drawn acute interest from anthropologists and other social scientists who have explored notions of the body as biological as well as social and symbolic entity. By mapping inscription of cultural principles onto the body, scholars have sought to "read" the social significance of the body—its health, illness, beauty, gestures, sexuality (for example, Fox 1994:20). Attention to the body as a locus of political struggle has been a particularly rich area. Foucault, for example, described modes of disciplining a populace through the proliferation of state surveillance of the most intimate aspects of its citizens' lives and through adjusting bodily and habitual temporalities (1972, 1979, 1980). Contemporary work on gender in this vein has asked how political agendas are inscribed on the bodies and consciousness of women through enforced idealizations of thinness and genital mutilation, and on restrictive ideas of clothing codes, birth practices, and aging (e.g., Gordon, 1974; Lindenbaum and Lock, 1993; Lock, 1993b; 1993c). Countering the charge that the female body has become a target of control and surveillance, as in Foucauldian treatments of bodies as products or projections of cultural agendas rather than sites of pragmatic social activity, have been works on the notion of "resistance" to imposed authority, an idea that accommodates scope for maneuver as people attempt to influence fertility practices. A well-known example is Emily Martin's book, *The Woman in the Body (*1987), which suggests

that efforts to medicalize birth can backfire, sparking resistance among women who seek to reclaim an active role in childbirth. Reflecting these dual possibilities, the situation of older Gambian women who remain in Spain -- the survivors of substitution practices – offers a window into ways of understanding the situation of immigrant African women in Europe. Cut off from some facets of family life in Africa and from others in Europe, those who remain sometimes find new ways of "belonging" in immigrant Europe.

The reports that one can assemble from a number of sources, whether ethnography or demography, hint at a fascinating story. They are, as we stressed, highly provisional and not altogether consistent. Attempting to reconcile the demographic figures with the ethnography on elements of legality and marriage in particular may be impossible, since there is every reason to suspect that immigrants in the most marginal circumstances may want to speak only in the most indirect ways about their lives. But all the results we have been able to assemble speak forcefully to the complexity of great "circulation" models that mesh poorly with the narrow, static definitions of spouses and biological children, the basic categories now allowed under family reunification schemes in Europe, and which we see reflected on the surface of the official census and register sources.

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