

Racial discrimination and gender relations: patterns of union formation of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in France

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Abstract

Whereas exogamy is considered a reliable indicator of immigrant's assimilation, we propose to study patterns of union formation taking into account racial discrimination experienced by immigrant groups. The purpose of this research is to describe and analyse patterns of union formation of Sub-Saharan African migrants living in France. We support the idea that these patterns are an indicator of racial boundaries produced in French society and that reveal gender-specific processes. Analyses are based on a French survey performed in 2005 among 973 women and 901 men born in a sub-Saharan African country, living in Paris and its surroundings, and aged 18-49. Our results show that mixing - i.e. relations with partners born in a different country – is common, especially in non-cohabiting relationships. However, a significant proportion of respondents have a partner from a different sub-Saharan African country. This intra-African segregation of sexual networks is likely to be favoured by living conditions of these populations in France. They experience racial discrimination in accessing housing and employment, which results in residential segregation in deprived areas and professional segmentation in devalued industries. These processes probably produce specific patterns of union formation, beyond national origin. Important gender differences arise in non-cohabiting relationships given that intra-African mixing mostly occurs among

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women and extra-African mixing, among men. Women's sexual networks may be less diversified, especially because of family reunification and because of their poorer access to the job market. Moreover, this could be an indication of the gendered nature of sexual norms. The greater control over women's sexuality may therefore lead to a stronger constraint on their choice of a sub-Saharan African partner.

Introduction

According to the theory of immigrant integration (Kazal 1995), exogamy - defined as the union between a member of an immigrant group and a member of the native population – is a reliable indicator of immigrant’s assimilation (Todd 1994; Tribalat 1995). This theory, known as “classical” theory of immigrant integration – or “straight line assimilation” - considers that a "natural" process leads to a gradual loss of native culture in favor of the host country (Alba and Nee 2003). Intermarriage is then a key indicator of the assimilation process: immigrants marrying native speakers is the result of their integration (Park and Burgess 1921). Yet, counter-examples have called into question the idea of a systematic link between exogamy and assimilation. Some immigrant groups have positive socioeconomic outcomes despite high levels of endogamy whereas others are characterized by low socioeconomic status despite high levels of exogamy. The theory of segmented assimilation has helped formalizing these examples by distinguishing cultural and socioeconomic dimensions of the assimilation process (Zhou 1997).

In the French context, studies contribute to nuance the role of intermarriage in the process of economic integration of immigrants (Safi 2007; Safi 2008). While Asian and Portuguese immigrants are characterized by strong community ties (reflected in a high propensity to endogamy) and high socioeconomic status, the North Africans immigrants and sub-Saharan African experience a high degree of cultural integration that contrasts with a persistent disadvantage in the labour market (Safi 2008). These results show that it is the economic integration that seems problematic in France, especially for immigrant groups who suffer most from discrimination (Safi 2007).

The theory of immigrant integration and the theory of segmented assimilation consider exogamy as a reliable indicator of the assimilation process, the major difference lies in the definition of assimilation. Whereas the theory of segmented assimilation allowed to question

the link between intermarriage and economic integration, the assumption that intermarriage is an indicator of cultural integration persists.

Rather than consider exogamy in the perspective of immigrants' assimilation, we propose to analyse patterns of union formation taking into account racial discrimination experienced by immigrant groups. This theoretical shift implies considering the living conditions of immigrants in the countries of arrival - and not only their migratory paths. We will use the example of sub-Saharan African migrants living in France. The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyse patterns of union formation of sub-Saharan African migrants living in France. We support the idea that these patterns are an indicator of racial boundaries produced in French society and that reveal gender-specific processes. This paper analyses data from a large scale quantitative survey of 1,874 sub-Saharan African migrants living in Paris and its surroundings.

Conceptual framework

It is crucial to consider racial discrimination given its impact on living conditions. Migrants from sub-Saharan Africa experience racial discrimination in accessing housing and employment, which results in residential segregation in deprived areas and professional segmentation in devalued industries (Meurs, Pailhé et al. 2006; Pan Ké Shon 2009; Safi 2009). Given that places where people live and work are indeed places where they tend to form relationships with potential partners (Laumann, Gagnon et al. 1994; Bozon and Heran 2006), these processes of segregation and segmentation probably produce racially-segregated sexual networks, beyond national origin. Furthermore, racial discrimination contributes to the creation of African social networks no longer based on birth country (Quiminal and Timera 2002; Ndiaye 2008). These networks, which represent spaces of solidarity and sociability, can also become areas for meeting partners.

Moreover, these processes are gender-specific. Conceptualizations of gender should be extended to wider social interactions (migration, living conditions...) and not reduced to gender roles within the relationship (Kergoat 2001). Gender plays a key role in the construction of migratory paths as female migration is often linked to family reunification (Dahiden, Rosende et al. 2007; Pourette 2008). Gender relations also affect living conditions knowing that migrant women are generally less integrated into the labour market than migrant men (Insee 2005). Finally, social control over the sexuality of women may lead to stronger restrictions on their choice of partner.

Data and methods

Analyses are based on a French survey performed by *Inpes (Institut National de Prévention et d'Éducation à la Santé)*. This survey was carried out in 2005 among 973 women and 901 men born in a sub-Saharan African country, living in Paris and its surroundings, aged 18-49. The individuals were interviewed face to face between June and July 2005. A pilot survey was conducted in May 2005 among 65 individuals to ensure understanding of the questionnaire and to test the feasibility of the survey.

A random recruitment with gender and ethnically matched interviewers

While for reasons of feasibility, surveys of migrants tend to favour convenience sampling (Gras, Weide et al. 1999; Sadler, McGarrigle et al. 2006; van Veen, Kramer et al. 2009), this survey has relied on random recruitment (Lydié 2007; Lydié, Guilbert et al. 2008). To form the basis of the survey, the towns in the Ile-de-France region with over 5,000 inhabitants were divided into three strata based on the percentage of sub-Saharan African migrants in their population (>6%, 4-6%, 2-4%). In order to have multiplicity and a good dispersion of survey points, 50 towns were selected at random and in proportion to the relative importance of the stratum.

The survey was conducted in public spaces, from fixed survey sites (urban transport stations, markets, post offices, shopping centres) selected for their ability to attract different populations. These are the places where sub-Saharan African migrants are as likely to be found as other populations, given community areas would not necessarily have identified appropriate participants (McLean and Campbell 2003). A survey circuit connected the different sites. In order to take into account the different densities of the African immigrant population in the municipalities, the length of time spent at each site was inversely proportional to this density (i.e. 2 hours if > 6%; 3 hours if 4-6%; 4 hours if 2-4%).

Data collection was provided by 42 professional gender matched interviewers from a sub-Saharan African country. African interviewers were chosen to facilitate recruitment which took place in the street. Research has shown that the use of interviewers of the same origin as the respondents is associated with increased participation (Elam and Fenton 2003; McLean and Campbell 2003). However, this advantage can become a hindrance during the carrying out of the questionnaire due to difficulties in criticising cultural norms and in admitting deviant values or behaviour; it may also raise concerns regarding anonymity and confidentiality if interviewers meet someone of their community (Elam and Fenton 2003). To limit these risks, the interviewers did not conduct the interviews in their town of residence in order to prevent them from meeting people from their environment. In addition, the interviewers were all professionals and had received a two-day training course provided by the survey managers.

Interviewers were instructed to identify all contacts that did not lead to the completion of a questionnaire. Of the 14,164 contacts established, 9901 (69,9%) of the people concerned were eligible (people born in a sub-Saharan African country, living in Ile-de-France and aged 18-49). Of these, 2079 (21%) agreed to answer. The overwhelming majority of people refused before being told the subject of the survey and argued they did not have time to participate.

During the carrying out of the survey, 138 questionnaires were abandoned. After verification, 67 questionnaires were excluded because they were improperly completed. The final survey sample included 973 women and 901 men born in sub-Saharan Africa aged 18-49, living in Ile-de-France.

Questionnaire and analyses

The questionnaire provides detailed information on the characteristics of relationships and on partners (number of partners, relationship's characteristics and partner's ones...). The low rate of non-responses (less than 1%), even for questions regarded as sensitive (religion, residency status, sexual violence, etc.) suggests a robust dataset.

To describe patterns of sexual mixing, we consider both migration criteria (same country of birth) and minority status (being part of a sub-Saharan African minority). In this perspective, we identify three distinct situations: partner born in the same sub-Saharan African country as the respondent (no mixing); partner born in a different sub-Saharan African country (intra-African mixing), and partner born outside sub-Saharan Africa (extra-African mixing; usually the partner was born in France).

Given that different processes are at work depending on which kind of mixing is involved, we first compared characteristics of migration and of economic and sociocultural integration according to whether respondents were with a partner from their own country or not (no mixing *vs.* mixing). Then we compared, among those in mixed relationships, whether they were with someone of a different sub-Saharan African country or with someone born outside sub-Saharan Africa (intra-African mixing *vs.* extra-African mixing). Then, we described patterns of union formation according to age at migration and to cohabitation status (cohabiting *vs.* non cohabiting relationships). All these analyses distinguished responses of men and women and underline the gendered nature of processes of union formation.

Results and discussion

Sample characteristics

Migrants who participated to the survey represent a young and highly-educated population, yet economically disadvantaged (Table 1). A significant proportion of respondents are unemployed (20% of women and 23% of men) and report financial difficulties (23% of women and 24% of men). Moreover, migratory paths as well as characteristics of sexual relationships are gender specific. First, migration and living conditions in France are strongly linked to sex: arriving at a later age, men have often migrated to find work while women are more likely to have migrated for family reunification (Table 1). Although men are better educated and more often employed than women, they are also more likely to have a precarious residence permit and live in precarious housing conditions compared to women (22% vs. 13%; $p < 0.001$).

Table 1 - Socio-migratory characteristics, by gender

	Women	Men	p-value
N	601	626	
Socio-demographic and migratory characteristics			
Average age at survey [95% CI]	30.6 [30.0; 31.2]	32.3 [31.7; 32.9]	0.000
% with higher level of education	48.7	58.2	0.001
Average age on migration to France [95% CI]	20.1 [19.4; 20.8]	22.4 [21.8; 23.1]	0.000
% who migrated to find work	10.0	28.0	0,000
% who migrated for family reunification	44.5	16.7	0,001
% coming from West Africa	57.4	59.0	0.584
% with a precarious residence permit*	11.5	16.1	0.018
% in employment	46.0	57.0	0.000
% unemployed	20.0	23.0	0.245
% cohabiting with their partner	51.1	40.1	0.000

*precarious residence permit = awaiting or lack of residence permit or short-stay residence permit
Sample: people who have had sex with someone of the opposite sex in the last twelve months, N=1227
Example: 16.1% of men vs. 11.5% of women have a precarious residence permit
Source: KABP-migrants survey, Inpes, 2005

Mixing reveals a gendered migratory process...

Migration leads to an opening up of sexual networks, as confirmed by the importance of sexual mixing, *i.e.* relations with partners born in a different country (47% of women and 50% of men; NS). The conditions of migration play an important role in the construction of sexual and conjugal trajectories: both women and men came to France at a younger age when they were with a partner born in a different country than when their partner was from the same country (Table 2). Our analyses confirm that socialization in the French context influences patterns of union formation as indicated by frequency of mixing among respondents who migrated during childhood.

Whereas we would have expected a confluence of women and men's experiences who migrated during their childhood, gender differences arise : among those, women are much more likely than men to be with a partner from their own country. Furthermore, respondents whose partner was from a different country are more likely to originate from Eastern and Southern Africa (women: 8% vs. 3%; $p < 0,05$; men: 10% vs. 4%; $p < 0,01$).

Indicators of economic position show little variations when comparing mixed and non-mixed relationships (Table 2). In particular, no difference in financial situation was observed. On the contrary, characteristics of sociocultural integration are strongly related to whether individuals are with a partner from the same country or not: among individuals whose partner was born in a different country, speaking French at home is more frequent whereas regular practice of religion is less frequent (Table 2).

The relationship status plays an important role in patterns of sexual mixing. Being with a partner from the same country is more frequent in cohabiting relationships than in non-cohabiting relationships for women (63% vs. 43%; $p < 0.001$) as well as for men (58% vs. 44%; $p < 0.001$). In relationships synonymous with commitment and social visibility, the expectations of the family circle and their possible disapproval play a major role both in the choice of partner and in the desire of maintaining the relationship (Laumann, Gagnon et al. 1994).

... and questions the existence of an African minority

Findings concerning sexual mixing should be qualified as an important proportion of respondents have a partner from a different sub-Saharan African country (19% of men and 20% of women). Apart from cultural affinities, this intra-African segregation of sexual networks is likely to be favoured by the living conditions of these populations in France. The discrimination experienced by these populations in terms of access to housing and jobs contributes to the creation of African social networks no longer based only on the criterion of

the country of origin (Quiminal and Timera 2002; Ndiaye 2008). These networks, which represent areas of solidarity and sociability, can also become areas for meeting partners.

Comparisons of intra- and extra-African mixing revealed gender differences. Migration conditions do not influence patterns of mixing for women whereas they do for men : they migrated later when their partner, and were born in a different sub-Saharan African country compared with men, whose partner was not born in a sub-Saharan African country (Table 2). No difference was noticed according to region of birth neither for women nor for men.

Indicators of economic position reveal significant variations. Among respondents with a partner born in a different sub-Saharan African country, women are more often students whereas men are more often unemployed. Financial situation seems to be slightly more difficult among men and women whose partner is born in a different sub-Saharan African country compared with those whose partner was not born in a sub-Saharan African country (Table 2). Finally, as it was observed when comparing non-mixed and mixed relationships, characteristics of sociocultural integration play an important role. Both women and men were less likely to speak French at home and more likely to report practising their religion regularly when their partner was born in a different sub-Saharan African country compared with those whose partner was not born in a sub-Saharan African country (Table 2).

Our results show that patterns of union formation are gender-specific. Whereas patterns of sexual mixing are similar for women and men in cohabiting relationships, important gender differences arise in non-cohabiting relationships where women are more likely than men to have a partner from a different sub-Saharan country (28% vs. 18%; $p < 0.05$) (**Figure 1**). Among non-cohabiting relationships, sexual mixing is gender specific as shown by the importance of intra-African mixing for women compared to extra-African mixing for men.

On the one hand, women's sexual networks may be less diversified, especially because of family reunification and of their poorer access to the job market (Insee 2005; Beauchemin,

Hamel et al. 2010). On the other hand, this could be an indication of the gendered nature of sexual norms which imply that sexuality belongs preferentially to a conjugal setting for women, both in their country of origin and in France (Wellings, Collumbien et al. 2006; Bajos and Bozon 2011). The greater social control over women’s sexuality and the fact that women more often see their partner as a potential spouse may therefore lead to a stronger constraint on their choice of a sub-Saharan African partner. As the definition of boundaries between groups is particularly strong for women’s sexuality, women are probably subjected to a stronger constraint on their “choice” of a sub-Saharan African partner. This may be an indicator of the transformation of boundaries between groups, no longer based on the country of birth but rather based on the fact of being part of this sub-Saharan African minority.

Figure 1 - partner’s origin by cohabitation and sex

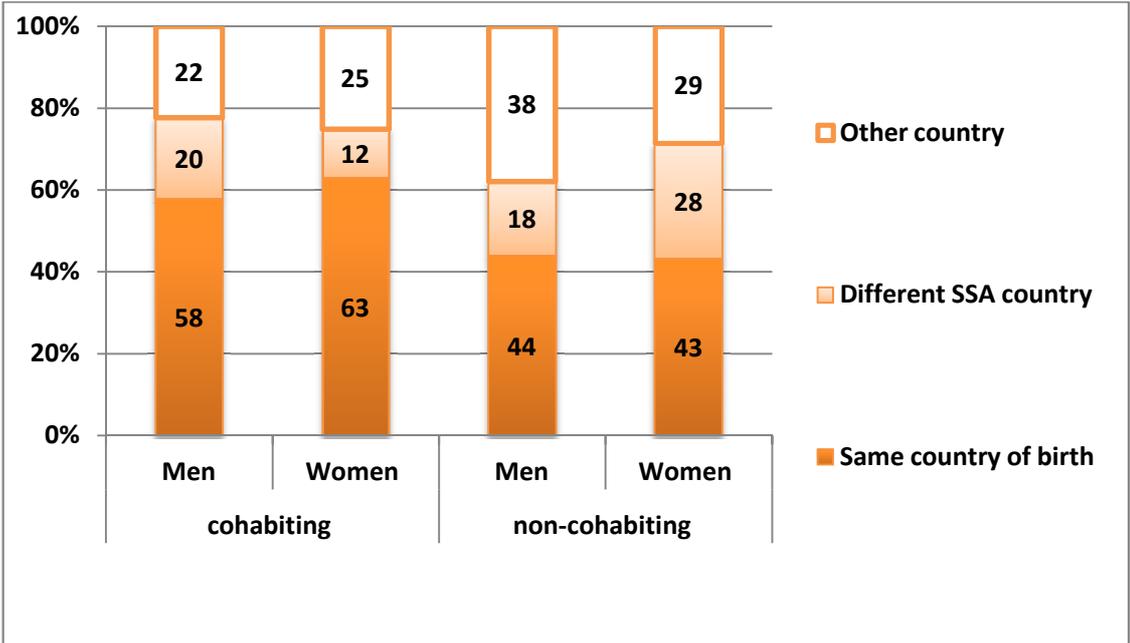


Table 2 -Characteristics of migratory paths and sociocultural integration according to the origin of the partner, by gender

	Women				All	Men				All
	Non-mixed	Mixed	Intra-African	Extra-African		Non-mixed	Mixed	Intra-African	Extra-African	
	Born in the same country	Born in a different country				Born in the same country	Born in a different country			
Numbers	320	281	120	161	601	310	316	118	198	626
Age on migration to France										
0-9 years old	8.5	14.7	10.9	17.5	68	2.0	15.0	6.8	19.8	53
10-14 years old	9.4	13.6	16.0	11.9	68	5.6	7.6	6.8	8.1	41
15-19 years old	17.9	27.6	29.4	26.3	134	18.3	16.6	12.8	18.8	108
20-49 years old	64.2	44.1	43.7	44.4	327	74.2	60.8	73.5	53.3	418
p-value	0,000		0,376			0.000		0.002		
	(p1)*		(p2)*							
Region of birth										
West Africa	58.8	55.9	54.2	57.1	345	60.7	57.3	60.2	55.6	369
Central Africa	38.4	36.7	41.7	32.9	226	35.5	32.6	29.7	34.3	213
Eastern and Southern Africa	2.8	7.5	4.2	9.9	30	3.9	10.1	10.2	10.1	44
p-value	0.032		0.100			0.009		0.680		
Professional status										
Active	47.5	45.0	44.2	45.6	278	61.4	53.8	55.9	52.5	359
Unemployed	19.4	21.4	18.3	23.8	122	24.4	21.8	28.0	18.2	144
Student	16.3	26.4	32.5	21.9	126	11.4	23.1	14.4	28.3	108
Not working	16.9	7.1	5.0	8.8	74	2.9	1.3	1.7	1.0	13
p-value	0.000		0.000			0.001		0.020		
Financial situation										
OK	48,3	53,7	47,5	58,4	279	44,2	46,3	39,3	50,5	305
Difficult	51,7	46,6	52,5	41,6	337	55,8	53,7	60,7	49,5	295
p-value	0,182		0,070			0,600		0,055		
Language spoken at home										
French	39.1	62.0	53.0	68.9	282	49.3	63.4	57.5	67.0	338
Other languages	60.9	38.0	47.0	31.1	283	50.7	36.6	42.5	33.0	262
p-value	0.000		0.008			0.001		0.098		
Religious practice										
Regular	55.5	34.9	45.8	26.7	275	57.8	43.3	58.6	34.2	313
Not regular	44.5	65.1	54.2	73.3	325	42.2	56.7	41.4	65.8	307
p-value	0.000		0.001			0.000		0.000		

* p1 compares mixed relationships and non-mixed relationships while p2 compares intra-African mixing and extra-African mixing

Sample: people who have had sex with someone of the opposite sex in the last twelve months, N=1227

Example:

Source: KABP-migrants survey, Inpes, 2005

Conclusion

These results question the existence of patterns of unions formation over and beyond national origin, namely intra-African patterns and they confirm the importance of taking into account the specific experiences of men and women. Shared experience of racial discriminations may facilitate the constitution of a sub-Saharan African minority, beyond country of birth, as shown by the fact that most people have sub-Saharan African partners. Moreover, important gender differences can be seen in non-cohabiting relationships given that it is mostly intra-African mixing among women and extra-African mixing among men. Women's sexual networks may be less diversified, especially because of family reunification and of their poorer access to the job market. Moreover, this could be an indication of the gendered nature of sexual norms. The greater social control over women's sexuality may therefore lead to a stronger constraint on their choice of a sub-Saharan African partner.

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