

Summary

Title:

Families in Movement: Transformation of the family in urban Mali, with a focus on intercontinental mobility

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This thesis is about the transformation of family relations in urban Mali, with a focus on intercontinental mobility. The main question is in what ways family relations are transforming, both in urban Mali as for Malian migrants in Europe, and what insights this offers for the use of the concept family in social sciences. This can be an interesting addition both for migration studies, that do not always go very much into family relations, and for studies about social changes in modern Africa.

Considering changes in family relations in urban Africa, a literature study has shown different processes and approaches. The family can be seen as a social network, and thereby as a way to achieve things. Other studies point to an upcoming individualism. Other changing processes are the increasing importance of consumption and, connected to that, changing sexual norms and values.

Similar developments were also found in a case study of a family in Segou. By looking at marriage, relations to the extended family, the importance of consumption, and the widespread wish and practice of migration among youth, it was shown how family relations are subject to change. There should thus no longer be spoken about 'the African family' as a system or order of society as used to be common in anthropology, but attention should be paid to the contemporary dynamics.

Concerning Malian migrants in Europe, in this study limited to The Netherlands, changes in family relations can be seen even clearer. On the one hand a distance arises between them and the family in Mali, because of changing values in case of a long stay in Europe, and different knowledge that is difficult to transfer. On the other hand, migrants do stay connected to their family because of imagination, contact, and the eternal wish to return. Living in Europe, some migrants are totally covered in a Malian surrounding, while others consciously distance themselves from Malian social contacts. A new kind of relation that occurs, perhaps a challenge to traditional ideas of the family, is that between a younger Malian man and an older Dutch woman. Hereby access to a residence permit often plays an important role.

The main conclusions that are drawn are that the family should not be seen as a 'fixed category', but as a dynamic process. An increasing individualism is occurring, especially when people have more options. Finally, family relations of some groups can be seen increasingly separate from a certain place, and because of the normality of mobility in a global context it becomes important to look at global kinship relations.