

Following Migrants' Transfers between New York, Paris, and Dakar¹

How Social Remittances Reflect and Affect Social Hierarchies

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Introduction

The migration-development nexus produced scores of studies on migrants' economic transfers but this body of evidence produced contradictory findings. This literature highlighted the uncertain impacts of financial remittances (de Haas 2007 ; de Haas 2012) due to the contingency of their consequences on the socio-political contexts in which they occur (de Haas 2012 ; Lacroix 2013). The analysis of the impact of migrations on sending areas led scholars to focus on the political consequences of geographic mobility. Several recent studies have examined the political role played by migrants in sending areas (Al-Ali and Koser 2002 ; Chauvet and Mercier 2014 ; Kapur 2010, 2014 ; Lacroix 2013 ; Pfütze 2012 ; Sasse 2013).

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This line of thoughts demonstrates that in addition to money, migrants remit political claims, expectations and beliefs. Peggy Levitt coined the term of “social remittances” to analyze how ideas, practices and know-how travel along migratory paths (Levitt 1998, 2001 ; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011 ; Levitt and Rajaram 2013). This concept marked a turning point in the analysis of the migration-development nexus: since, this body of literature makes claims about the powerful impact of social transfers (Kapur 2010, 2014 ; Lafleur 2013 ; Levitt and Rajaram 2013 ; Piper 2009 ; Sasse 2013 ; Tabar 2014). Some have claimed that nonfinancial remittances are potentially greater in their impacts than economic remittances (Kapur 2014: 484).

However these two dimensions are so intimately interdependent that one might wonder: is it really relevant to oppose social and economic flows? Building on previous research about migrants’ remittances, I propose a more comprehensive approach that considers both financial and nonfinancial transfers. More specifically, I develop an original perspective on the extent to which migrants’ financial remittances underpin the circulation of social, relational and cognitive transfers.

Outline

The interdisciplinary and transnational enables me to address three main research questions. I explore the extent to which:

- (1) Financial remittances signal the maintenance of transnational ties favoring the circulation of social remittances.

(2) Social remittances reflect social hierarchies. Financial remittances reinforce asymmetrical relationships between senders and receivers. Accordingly, the circulation of social remittances reflects these asymmetrical social positions.

(3) Social remittances reshuffle social hierarchies. Social statuses are social constructs underpinned by entrenched beliefs. This paper shows how migrations affect beliefs (or social categories) legitimizing and underpinning social hierarchies.

The findings developed in this paper emerged from the analysis of two original datasets, both interdisciplinary in their design and transnational in their realization.

Empirical Strategy: From Structural Equation Modeling to Transnational Ethnographies

(1) Quantitative Data: A Transnational Exit Poll (Paris – New-York – Dakar)

This “Sondage sortie des urnes” (2012) consisted in a quantitative data collection: 923 Senegalese voters were interviewed on the day of Senegalese elections, at the exit of polling stations:

- The first phase was realized on the day of the presidential elections (February 26, 2012) in the United States and in France (respectively 199 and 354 questionnaires were collected in Senegalese consulates of Paris and New-York);
- The second phase was realized on the day of legislative elections (July 1st, 2012) in France and in Senegal (respectively 207 and 163 questionnaires were collected in Paris and Dakar).

Four principle sections questioned Senegalese voters on their socio-demographic characteristics; the intensity of their transnational connections; their political or associative engagement; and their social transfers.

This design enables us to compare how profiles, trajectories and political behaviors differ between two destination countries and between the home and the host country.

(2) Modeling strategy

One obvious limit of the design is the relatively small size of the sample especially concerning Senegal (we collected 716 observations in destination countries but only 207 in Senegal).

The paper reviews different possible modeling strategies given the structure of the data, the asymmetry of certain questions and the specific distribution of the whole sample. I use a statistical method adapted to develop complex models out of small samples (Chin & Newsted 1999; Henseler and Sarstedt 2013 : 566): Structural Equation Modeling. I detail the technical and theoretical advantages of this technique and expose some limits of this approach (Acock 2013 ; Bollen and Long eds. 1993 ; Henseler and Sarstedt 2013).

The paper presents three structural models (see preliminary graphs in annex); I discuss alternative explanations for the main findings and propose robustness checks (Henseler and Sarstedt 2013).

Finally, I turn to qualitative evidence to illuminate the quantitative results and identify explanatory *mechanisms*.

(3) Qualitative Dataset: A Transnational Team of Ethnographers

The TIMME² project (2012) was an interdisciplinary and transnational data collection combining different methods of analysis. Our team used a quantitative database³ to map migrants' organizations in Senegal and select case-studies of organizations created by and for Senegalese migrants in France. Then we identified the chapters of those Home Town Associations (HTAs) in

² The TIMME project (Terrains Interdisciplinaires et Multi-Sites : Migrants et Engagements). Cf. [website](#).

³ The MIDDAS project (Migrations Internationales et Développement : Données Appariées migrants-familles d'origine au Sénégal). Cf. [website](#).

France, in Dakar, and in the villages of origins and we conducted parallel ethnographic fieldwork in the different chapters. The last phase of fieldwork was realized by bi-national duos of ethnographers in Dakar and in the different villages of intervention of these HTAs. Finally the team of Senegalese and French ethnographers analyzed jointly the ethnographic data collected in more than thirty locations over the course of ten months. This stage produced original empirical material: cross-cultural analysis of the dynamics of cultural circulation between Europe and Africa.

The combination of these transnational datasets is critical to articulate the different scales of analysis relevant to develop a comprehensive accounting of migrants' transfers. The combination of these rich sources enables me to analyze the extent to which financial and nonfinancial flows interrelate (part 1); and how they reflect (part 2) and affect (part 3) social hierarchies.

Findings

(1) The Relational Function of Financial Remittances

I extend on approaches to the interplay between financial and social remittances (Vickstrom 2013) to show that migrants' economic transfers have ultimately a relational function: they participate in sustaining transnational interpersonal ties. A first statistical analysis explores the interrelations between financial remittances, social remittances and transnational ties⁴. I connect this quantitative perspective to theoretical accountings of the relational dimension of economic flows and I posit that material and immaterial transfers are part and parcel of a

⁴ See the preliminary presentation of the "variables of interest" in annex. Extended abstract PAA (September 2014)

transnational relational work (Zelizer 2005 ; Zelizer and Tilly 2007). I synthesize these findings in a first structural model (see graph 1).

(2) Asymmetries and Power

The second section points to the reciprocal but *asymmetrical* dynamics underpinning remittances. I propose that social remittances circulate within homophilous *and* strongly hierarchized networks. Migrants' networks between France and Senegal illustrate how inequalities of socio-economic positions determine the respective positions of sender/receiver of social remittances (graph 2). In this respect, transnational networks tend to produce *status-based externalities*: such externalities are positive when social practices – or social remittances – originate from senders of higher social status than receivers (DiMaggio and Garip 2011, 2012). I develop how such mechanisms ultimately illuminate why the practices of the dominants tend to trickle down.

(3) Circulation of Social Categories: Transnational Meaning-making

In the third section, I show that migrants reinforce *and reshuffle* social hierarchies. Indeed the qualitative fieldwork illuminates how migrations challenge the categories underpinning traditional hierarchies. Migrants' experiences abroad can modify their perceptions of social hierarchies; the ethnographic data illuminates the mechanisms through which migrants promote shifts in collective beliefs. The last section points to the extent to which international migration participate in the circulation of cognitive categories which have ultimately socio-economic consequences (see Costa-Lopes and al. 2013 ; Jost and al. 2004 ; Magee and Galinsky 2008). I emphasize how social categories underpinning social hierarchies are cognitive constructs potentially affected by individuals' cultural experiences and trajectories.

Conclusion

This paper strives to propose a more comprehensive epistemological framework to account for the channels through mobility affect sending societies. In this respect, I contribute to the literature in three key ways. First, I draw upon theoretical approaches to economic sociology to connect two bodies of literature: on economic remittances, on the one hand, and on social remittances, on the other hand. I argue that these studies are too often kept separate in spite of the fact that they analyze two sides of a same phenomenon. I propose an interdisciplinary accounting of the multidimensional dimension of migrants' transfers.

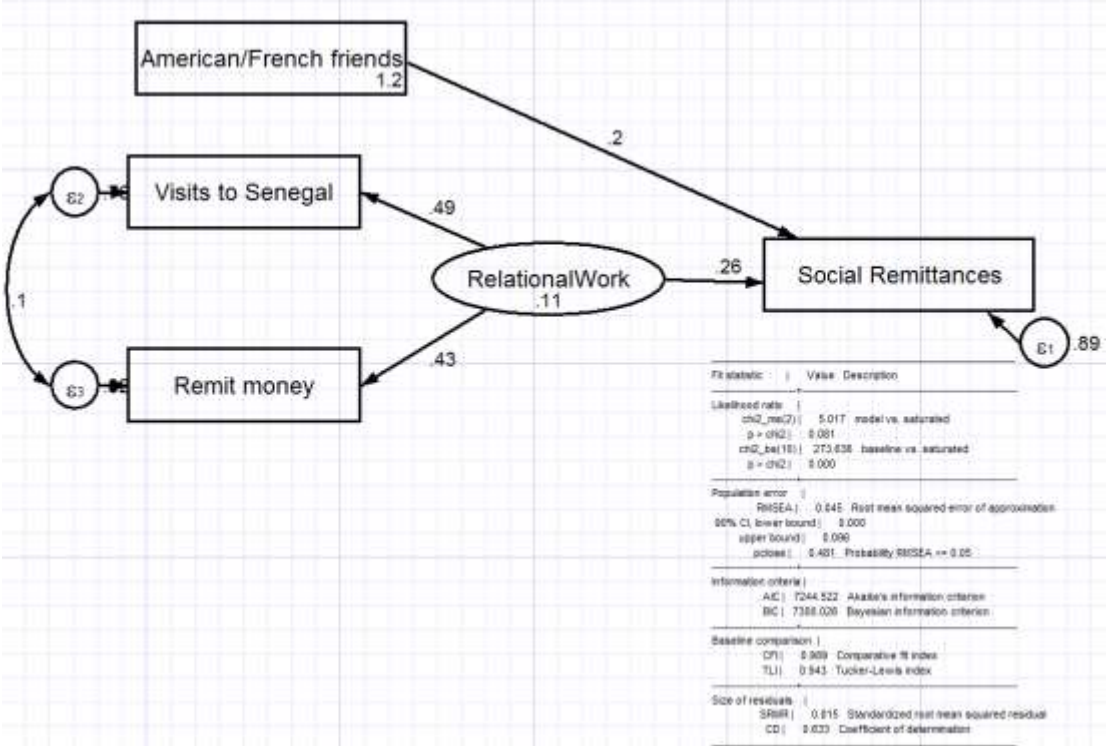
Second, I argue that financial remittances reinforce asymmetrical transnational links that favor the circulation of social remittances. The literature on networks analysis (DiMaggio and Garip 2011, 2012) provides useful conceptual tools to develop a comprehensive accounting of the circulation of social remittances between interrelated but asymmetrical actors. This perspective illuminates why the wealthiest migrants are more likely to diffuse their ideas and behaviors. In this paper, I propose to better articulate how transnational trajectories interact with local social hierarchies. Yet, more research is needed to develop a dynamic and transnational accounting of social statuses: I contend that the striking variations of migrants' social positions in their home and host countries are still not accounted for in a systematic way.

Third I analyze the channels through which migrants can reframe local hierarchies. To do so, I unpack how social statuses are ultimately underpinned by cognitive schemes potentially challenged by migrations. This line of thoughts illustrates how international migrations, especially between highly unequal settings, represent an extreme form of cultural experience.

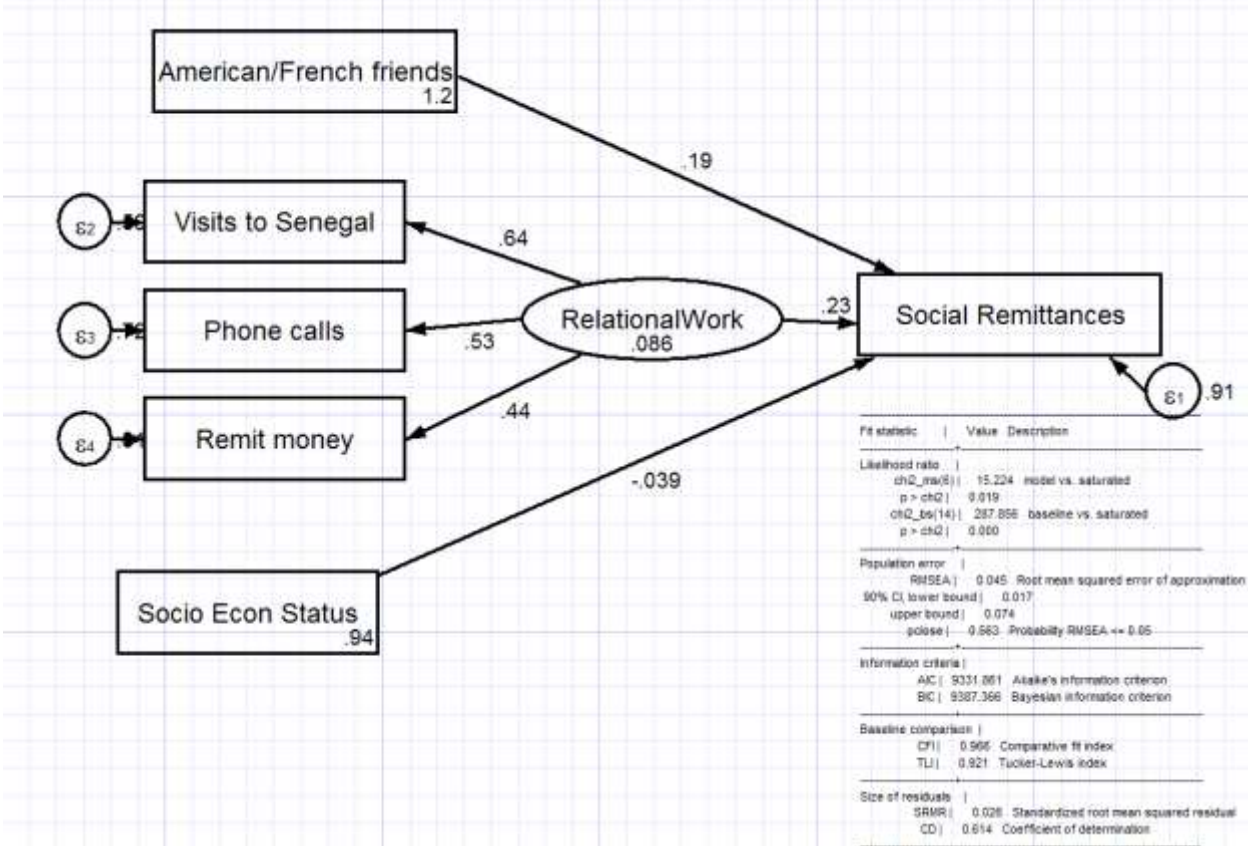
Questioning the consequences of remittances on social hierarchies, this paper mobilizes and articulates recent findings of economic sociology, network analysis and cognitive sociology. I hope that this perspective illustrates the heuristic of developing a comprehensive epistemology of the dynamics shaping a world on the move.

Preliminary Models

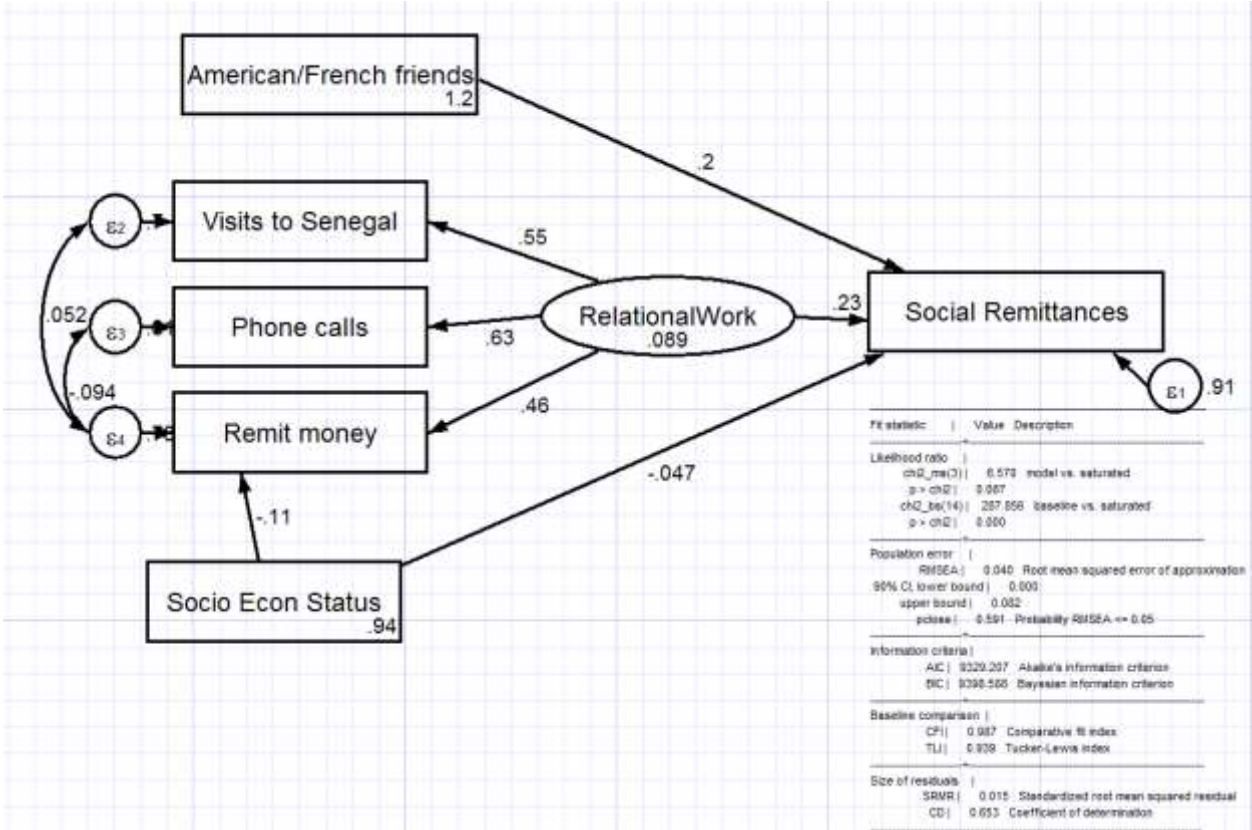
Model 1



Model 2



Model 3



Excerpt [model 3]	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Structural						
Social	Remittances					
	Relational Work	0.632488	0.0932473	6.78	0.00	0.449727 0.815249
	Socio Econ. Status	-0.05995	0.046487	-1.29	0.197	-0.15106 0.031164
	Speaks politics w. American/French friends	1	(const.)			
		1.206298	0.0920929	13.1	0.00	1.025799 1.386797
	Economic capital: income					
	Socio Econ. Status	-0.23124	0.0385919	-5.99	0.000	-0.30688 -0.1556
		2.338958	0.0654546	35.73	0.000	2.210669 2.467247
	Relational capital: networks					
	Socio Econ. Status	-0.06285	0.041988	-1.5	0.134	-0.14515 0.019442
		1.299646	0.0712146	18.25	0.000	1.160068 1.439224
	Social capital: political affiliations					
	Socio Econ. Status	0.216799	0.0421662	5.14	0.000	0.134155 0.299444
		1.946389	0.071517	27.22	0.000	1.806219 2.08656
Measurement						
	Financial transfers (remit money)	0.482564	0.1394445	3.46	0.001	0.209257 0.75587
		0.803714	0.0144647	55.56	0.000	0.775363 0.832064
	Visits to HH in Senegal	0.706923	0.3506351	2.02	0.044	0.01969 1.394155
		0.706897	0.0165769	42.64	0.000	0.674407 0.739387
	Phone calls to HH in Senegal					
		0.902142	0.3780986	2.39	0.017	0.161082 1.643202
Covariances	var(e.SR)	1.450289	0.0848513			1.293164 1.62651
	var(e.tr)	0.136135	0.011172			0.114997 0.16116
	var(e.vi2)	0.160789	0.0305312			0.110823 0.23328
	var(e.te2)	0.139951	0.0336041			0.087416 0.22406
	var(e.ceco)	1.056806	0.0544283			0.955336 1.16905
	var(e.crel)	1.250987	0.0644291			1.130873 1.38386
	var(e.csoc)	1.261632	0.0649773			1.140495 1.39564
	var(RelationalWork) 	0.092857	0.049118			0.032927 0.26186
		0.020871	0.0120591	1.73	0.084	-0.00276 0.044506
	cov(e.tr,e.vi2)	0.013108	0.0262777	0.5	0.618	-0.0384 0.064611

Variables of interest

Variables	Questions	Nature
Economic remittances	Do you send money to your country of origin? If yes, how often (in general)? How much money have you sent over the past 12 months (in \$)?	Binary
Social Remittances	SR1: “Did you encourage your family members to register to vote?” SR2: “Did they take into account your opinion?” SR3: “Did you give any voting orders to your family home?” SR4: “Did they take into account your opinion?” SR5: “Are you member of: (1) M23 (2) Y’en a marre?”	Score
Phone calls	How often to do you call your HH in Senegal?	Score
Visits	How often do you usually visit your HH in Senegal?	Score
Speak politics w. American/French friends	Do you generally talk about American/French politics? If yes, with whom? Var. = 1 if [3. With American friends 4. With colleagues in the US] Var. 0= if 1. With family members in the US 2. With Senegalese friends in the US 5. With family members in the Senegal 6. With Senegalese friends in Senegal]	Binary
Income	Income brackets (5 mod)	Discrete
Socio Econ. Status	Diploma (3 mod) CSP (3 mod)	Discrete

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