

***Searching for legality. Asymmetrical bodily opportunities.***

*Chiara Quagliariello*

*University of Siena*

Starting from the results of research carried out among the Senegalese community of Poggibonsi (Siena), this paper will attempt to demonstrate the modes in which women's entry into the community has allowed for the overcoming of the distinct social marginality common to the migrant experience in Italy, as well as for the increase of Senegalese immigrants' access to legality. In particular, the normalization of the Senegalese presence, resulting from the "normalizing function" assumed by women, will be examined in light of the recent crisis of productive systems in Italy and in the Western world.

The attempt, in extreme synthesis, will be to demonstrate how the devaluation of the productive dimension, as evidenced by the economic crisis, correlates today to the preeminence of the reproductive function embodied by women. In particular, the examination of this imbalance in favor of women will be carried out, initially, by the consideration of the two contexts in which migrants' lives take place: in their homeland and in their new country of residence. Therefore, in the first part of this study, I will focus on the articulation of gender relationships within the Senegalese context, in the second, on the characterization of Senegalese migration in Poggibonsi. In such a way, the analysis of modes in which immigrants construct their identity, and of the modes in which the Italian government interacts in this process, will permit for reflection on the centrality of women's role in the migratory experience. The third and final part of the paper, in fact, will focus on the process involved in redefining women's reproductive function as an instrument of access to legality. Beginning with the identification of the procreative function as a tactical resource turned to in times of crisis, I will explore the passage between Senegal and Italy today as constituting a reinforcement, rather than an

overcoming, of gender differences. If the principle means to a women's self-establishment remains procreation, what changes, in fact, is solely the way in which its meaning is attributed: within Senegal, it serves to perpetuate social groups; outside of Senegal, it provides immigrants with access to legality.

### **1. Womanhood for the Sake of Motherhood: Gender Construction in Senegal.**

As mentioned above, in order to understand the articulation of gender relations in the migratory experience, one must first consider the distinct modes in which identities are constructed within the immigrants' mother country. Through a study of feminine and masculine forms, I will examine the relationship between production and reproduction at the foundation of social organization in Senegal, with the intention of then reflecting on their sense of permanence and/or transformation while living abroad in a new environment.

In this sense, the first, evident fact to consider lies in the apparent symmetry between the masculine universe and the productive function, and, conversely, between the feminine universe and the reproductive function. In recognizing these two diverse realities, we are thus recognizing a culturally-determined constant, resistant to changes that have characterized and still characterize life in Senegal. If, in particular, the agricultural crisis and rising urbanization—results of the rural exodus—have transformed traditional forms of production, the relationships within this refaced economy seem still to be centered around a sexually-determined division of labor. What follows, is the vehement exclusion of woman from the market and from employment; an exclusion dependent even today on women's primary occupation in the "sector" of reproduction. In as such, we witness the permanent establishment of a mutually-dependent relationship, founded on respective gender roles—a relationship in which women depend upon

men for access to economic resources and men depend upon women for access to social reproduction. And though the bond between economic structure and social organization has apparently weakened, it does not seem to have diminished the central role of the procreative experience in the construction of gender. In other words, even if the crisis of the agricultural system and the consequent abandonment of rural labor has resulted in a loss of the traditional roles of “reproducers of producers”—described by Meilleusseux in his study carried out on the Ivory Coast (Meilleussuex:1975)—women continue to be recognized as the only means by which a group’s survival may be guaranteed, providing ancestors with their descendents. Such a social function manifests itself in the commonly held conception that she who is not a mother is not a woman, along with the widespread choice of women to renounce their pursuit of a career in order to dedicate themselves to the raising of their children. Another underlying element of the conception of maternity as a woman’s principle occupation can be identified still today in the gender roles witnessed in Islam, where the representation of the female body as being naturally predisposed to the perpetuation of the group permits a single man to take many wives, all destined to become mothers. Seen in this manner, women’s exclusion from the job market appears to depend principally on economic and social forces. The few activities in which many women are engaged take place, in fact, in the sector of the so-called “informal economy”, characterized by its largely female constituency in Senegal. The identification of men with a productive function and of women with a reproductive function is reflected discernibly in everyday life, from public and private education, to job training and administrative training within the domestic space. As diverse forms of control are exercised on the body, the clearly sexualized path to identity construction is made further apparent by the various modes in which men and women yield to or resist their sexually-determined roles. It is precisely in assuming

gender difference as a presupposed fact of social organization that a mutually-dependent relationship appears still to form the foundation of community structure in Senegal, within which the requirement of women to conceive of themselves as mothers is comparable to the economic contribution required of men.

Between the many forms of occupation present today in Senegalese society, I will here take into consideration that of transnational migration, understood as an occupational choice brought about by a transformation of the local economic system.

## **2. The work of migrants between Senegal and Italy.**

Senegalese migration into Italy began in the mid-1980s, coinciding with the crisis of agricultural production founded on the cultivation of peanuts, as well as with the choice of the French government to drastically limit the amount of foreigners permitted into the country. If from the 1960s it is possible to trace the existence of an initial migratory movement toward France, it is only towards the mid-1980's that an increased amount of departures are observed—the so-called Senegalese diaspora—towards southern European countries, and in particular towards Italy and Spain. Such an increase in departures can be attributed to two different causes: the representation of migration as a possibility to succeed in times of crisis, and the absence in those years of rigid immigration laws in countries long considered as places of departure, rather than arrival. As we will see, the diffusion of migrant work—indicated in Wolof by the term *Modou Modou*—comes shortly after to be seen by the Senegalese population as an extension of the Senegalese job market beyond the country's borders, thus reinforcing its masculine characterization. In this sense, the idea of migration as a modern form of occupation, or, better yet, the possibility of employment tied to the growing interdependence of the local and global economy, is confirmed

by the organization and preparation of emigrants carried out by the groups themselves. In the majority of cases, in fact, the choice falls on the subjects that display the greatest productive potential, that is, on those of a prime age and a social status suited for migrant work. In this sense, it is the young of the family—those not yet married and without children—that represent the ideal emigrants, whose social success depends, above all, on their economic success. As will be seen, such primacy of the economic aspect will find fertile land in Italy, where, in the same mode, the figure of the migrant is seen in regards to his or her value in the job market. This consideration of men as productive bodies is not limited to the migratory context, but finds its place just as well in the local economy of Senegal, representing the new transnational dimension of the Senegalese and Italian job markets.

Returning to the analysis of migration, another aspect to consider are the prevalent, gender-based characterizations. The traditional differentiation of the productive/masculine and reproductive/feminine functions presents migrant work as a possibility reserved, initially, only for men. As a consequence, one of the distinctive elements of Senegalese migration in Italy was, for a long time, represented by the absence of women. Different sociological studies (Colombo, Sciortino: 2003) in fact, describe the Senegalese case as a form of male migration par excellence, antithetical to other prevalent migrant groups - such as the Albanese or the Moroccans - and the flux of immigrants represented principally by women from Eastern Europe. The other aspect, particularly in Italy, distinguishing Senegalese migrants from those of other groups, is their continual mobility, involving a near constant alternation between trips abroad and reentry into Senegal, described by many anthropologists as a movement of “come and go.” (Castagnone: 2005). The representation of Italy as the center of the job market and of Senegal as a living space, subject to the practice of “come and go,” correlates to the research regarding the forms in

which wages are immediately invested in one's home country. For the same reasons, the privileged activity of many Senegalese immigrants in Italy is represented by the so-called "peddler's commerce"—the only sort of commerce which guarantees the rapid accumulation of capital, while also preserving the "here and there" dimension of these immigrants' lives (Riccio: 2002).

Taking as an example the case of the Senegalese community in Poggibonsi (Siena), I will attempt to demonstrate how this representation of immigrants as simple, temporary workers, though in favor of the so-called "come and go" norm, does not, likewise, favor its practice, creating a gap between the supposed model and the actual possibility of his attaining success.

## **2. A study of the Senegalese community in Poggibonsi (Siena).**

The presence of Senegalese in Poggibonsi—as well as in the nearby Val d'Elsa<sup>1</sup> (Siena)—begins, as throughout Italy, around the mid-1980s, reaching an effective consolidation in the course of the '90s. In agreement with the national tendency, the community was—at least in its first decade of existence—composed of men only, driven by the search for possible employment. The community's formation occurs, in fact, during a period of local economic expansion, causing it to appear initially as an "exception to the rule": the pressing demand of non-specialized labor in the sector of small and medium enterprises in fact brought about, in a short time, a reorientation of the migratory objective toward salaried jobs, the only jobs capable of guaranteeing access to legitimacy. It was just such a possibility to insert oneself into the job

---

<sup>1</sup> The term Val d'Elsa indicates the territory occupying the provinces of Siena and Florence, organized into five different communities of residence: Colle Val d'Elsa, Casole d'Elsa, Poggibonsi, Radicondoli, and San Gimignano. Among these, the main concentration of foreigners are found in Poggibonsi, where is found, as well, a large part of the Senegalese community here analyzed.

market that formed, for years, the principle mode of attracting foreigners to Val d'Elsa: within in a matter of years, in fact, one witnesses the arrival of many Senegalese immigrants who, though already living in Italy, did not hold a salaried job, and were therefore barred from legal recognition.

In examining the law<sup>2</sup> (189/02 and 286/98), in fact, we find that the recognition of foreigners as legitimate presences within Italy depends, above all, on one's insertion into the job market as a mode of participating in the national economy. Such dependence on an immigrant's employment status reflects, in this sense, their being considered not as people—referring to the terminology of Dal Lago (Dal Lago:1999)—but as simple, temporary workers: useful resources to the country for “a determined period of time.” This transformation of the occupational dimension as a necessary condition of legal citizenship can be looked at as radicalized form of the productive function normally attributed to men. If, in fact, the representation of immigrants as productive bodies establishes a continuity between their homeland and their foreign destination, the consideration of labour as the only means of legitimate living seems to characterize entirely the migrant experience. The representation of Italy as the seat of the job market and of Senegalese immigrants as temporary workers results, much of the time, in a reduction of the their life to its occupational dimension—from which results an extreme social marginality, observable in this case, as well as in a number of others.

As Senegalese immigrants both perceive of themselves and are perceived by the Italian state, as simple, temporary workers, they would seem, in general, to be in line with the criteria required for obtaining legal recognition. On the contrary, the transnational dimension of

---

2 The current law regarding the regulation of foreigners in Italy is n.189, 2002, in which are discussed many of the amendments contained in the preceding law n. 40, 1998, which then merge to form a single text, including all regulations concerning the area of immigration and rules regarding immigrants in Italy, noted as law n. 286, 1998.

Senegalese immigration eludes the normal system of immigration regulation, which is based on one's more permanent insertion into the national economy. It is, in the end, precisely the practice of "come and go" that bars them from regular work and from the hope of legal recognition. This impossibility of being simultaneously "here and there," brought about by the necessity of secure placement in the job market, appears, then, as the first form of control exercised by the Italian government on Senegalese immigrants. This system of control seems not to limit itself to the exercise of regulatory power, but attempts, as well, to redefine the various modes in which the members of its culture may carry out their lives: in reinventing what is considered necessary, in fact, the Italian government forces foreigners to adjust their aims in accordance with the law's concessions. As we will see in the case of Senegalese migration to Poggibonsi, the reduction of a migrant's life to its occupational dimension, precluded by the impossibility of being both "here and there," progressively strips the migratory project of its original nature: what began solely as means of finding temporary occupation, comes to resemble a lifestyle in which women may play a role. That is, the impossibility to find temporary work in Italy while maintaining a more permanent home in Senegal, transforms Senegalese migration from a one-dimensional "job search" to a multidimensional experience, one whose productive function is accompanied by the reproductive function of women. An analysis of the community of Poggibonsi and of its differing organization before and after the arrival of women, will permit for the elaboration of the main effects produced by the new, female presence. This elaboration will derive from demographic figures as well as from the ethnographic material collected through interviews, which together will illustrate the two separate phases of life within the community: the so-called *economic phase*, lasting between the end of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, and the so-called *social phase*, beginning in the late 1990s and continuing to the present day.

As might be expected, in the first of the two phases—that is, when Italy was still imagined simply as an “annexed workplace,” or rather, as a detached hub of the Senegalese productive system—the migrant group was composed solely of men, set on claiming their share of the economy in the least amount of time possible. The absence of life interests outside of their occupation, notable in this phase, resulted in the common choice of dividing a living space with fellow immigrants. In such a way, the first houses occupied by the Senegalese seemed to function as organized dormitories, with the objective of attracting the largest number of residents possible. In examining this work ethic of Senegalese immigrants in Italy, we must also consider the conditions in the group’s native country: in this sense, employment’s central role in the organization of everyday life seems not to depend only on forced living conditions of immigrants, but reflects also the value system shared by Modou Modou. In the majority of cases, in fact, the subjects are young, between the ages twenty and thirty, and originally from the area of Baol—the current region of Diourbel, and the homeland of Senegalese Mouridism. Their affiliation with the Mouride brotherhood, in particular, encourages the perception of these immigrants in Italy as being merely laborers: as is seen in the precepts of Mouridism, in fact, it is precisely through labor that *talibes* prove their faith. That which distinguishes this brotherhood from others is, in fact, the possibility for its followers to substitute prayer with work, which is considered an equally valid means of spiritual growth. For this motive, many followers of Mouridism choose to base their life on their occupation, which is thought of as a necessary sacrifice, fulfilling both one’s economic and religious needs. As evidenced in Italy, this primacy given to the occupational dimension seems to encourage the adoption of a lifestyle centered completely on production. It is in this sense that Mouridism seems to play an important role in the “predisposing” of the Senegalese to think of themselves, before all else, as laborers.

As this study of the community of Poggibonsi seems to indicate, the insertion of Senegalese immigrants into the Italian economic system has not, likewise, resulted in an equivalent integration into its social structure. This imbalance between social and economic integration has, over time, produced a relational and spatial isolation. In its first years of development, the community behaved in fact as a true enclave, pertinent to the rest of society solely from an economic point of view—an isolated microcosm wherein another language was spoken, another religion practiced, a different diet consumed, and where personal relationships were marked by foreign customs. This condition of isolation can be linked to the absence of a qualitative transformation within the group, which, for years, grew only quantitatively. The increase of Senegalese in Val d'Elsa, in fact, appears to correlate to the high demand for workers in the sector of small and medium enterprises, attracting, in this way, only those subjects who characterized themselves as manual labourers. Witnessed alongside the increase of Senegalese movement into Val d'Elsa, was a progressive decrease of movement across established migratory chains into Italian territory, developed to carry over family members still remaining in Senegal. As such, the new arrivals in Val d'Elsa did not alter the community's predominantly masculine character, thus preserving the image of Senegalese as simple, temporary workers, and limiting the community's possibility of integrating itself into Italian society. As will be seen, it is only with the arrival of Senegalese women that a progressive "decentralization" of labor's role will be witnessed, along with the consequent transformation of the Senegalese's outward perception: it is, finally, with their own reinvention of the migrant project that Senegalese immigrants come to be newly understood by Italians.

### **2.1.1. The immigration of women as a factor of social normalization.**

If in its first decade the Poggibonsi community was made up exclusively of males, it is toward the end of the 1990s that women begin to arrive. Their progressive entry and integration into the group signifies the passage from the economic phase to the social phase, marked by the overcoming of a lifestyle centered solely around work.

The first important transformation seems to regard the peripheral housing originally preferred by the men—as a matter of fact incompatible with the new need for personal space. Together, couples began searching for living options more suited to their lifestyle. This “territorial extension” of the group, owed to the increase of spaces occupied by nuclear and/or semi-extended families, seems, in a very short time, to have produced a betterment of the previously isolated conditions, namely in that these changes in lifestyle reflected more closely the lifestyle norms of Italian society. In this mode, the rearticulation of the group based on family needs normalized their presence, making them appear more as members of the local Italian community, and not merely as transitory workers.

This gradual change of lifestyle within the group likewise resulted in the decision to redirect, in part, their economic resources from Senegal to Italy. If up until the arrival of women the tendency was to invest a large part of their earnings back into their homeland, the increased needs of the group now encouraged immigrants to utilize their remittances. Such a tendency, of course, predicts that the increase in living costs was not accompanied by an increase in economic resources through women’s participation in the job market. In this sense, the exclusion of women from Italy’s productive system seems to depend on two separate factors: the difficulty of finding employment and the traditional non-economic role relegated to women. In relation to the first aspect, the difficulty of women faced in finding an occupation in Italy seems due to a rigid

segmentation of the job market, as a result of which, foreigners were permitted to partake in only a limited number of possible careers. In particular, it is only in those areas left “undiscovered” by Italians—such as heavy labor in the industrial and/or agricultural sector for men, and caretaking work for women—that jobs were available for foreigners. In the case of the Senegalese, if the hiring of men as unskilled workers seemed to find no resistance in Italy, the attempt of many women to find work as a caretaker was, on the other hand, met with much difficulty. For Senegalese women, in fact, caretaking was not considered to be their area of “expertise”: it was, rather, Eastern Europe women, in fact, who were taken to be the professionals in this sector, and were generally preferred over others for the position of “nanny.” As Andall (2000) described in his study on caretaking in Italy, such a hierarchy of preferences results in a form of double exclusion experienced by women of African origin, barred from the job market both for their gender and for the color of their skin.

Another important aspect to consider is the continued existence of traditional gender roles, on the basis of which, women’s principal duty and mode of self-realization continues to be identified as reproduction. As a consequence, the possibility for men to fulfill their “productive role” even in the absence of women, finds no correspondence in the possibility for women to fill their “reproductive role” in the absence of men; the relationship as such, a woman’s migratory experience is thus limited to her being accompanied by a man. In the case of the Poggibonsi community, in fact, a quick examination of the demographic statistics reveals that nearly all of the women emigrating from Senegal were wives coming to join their long-estranged husbands in Italy. It is in this sense that the “come and go” dimension of Senegalese immigration, as it concerns women, can be described as “ineffective,” in that it granted women the possibility to be wives without the chance of being mothers. In fact, in most cases, with the two partners

separated by a great distance, their marriage contract seems to function more as a formality than as a substantive reality, leaving women without a husband for long periods of time. As a consequence, we witness the desire of many women to join their husbands in a foreign country, in hopes that they will find a more acceptable place in society, made so by the presence of children. Likewise, the impossibility for men to be both “here and there,” often encouraged them to insist that their wives come to Italy, with the aim of constructing a more complete identity, one that encompasses the procreative experience. In accordance with the law, such a possibility depends on one’s status of regular employment and of a suitable residence. In this sense, even in the case of the community here considered, it is men’s participation in the job market which enables women to take part in the group and participate in the migratory experience. Therefore, according to the criteria established by law (189/2002), the introduction of the procreative function guaranteed by women seems to depend, in the first place, on men carrying out their productive function. As will be seen, this dependency on the economic capacity of men, given that the law deems it a prerequisite for the migration of women, implies the subordination of men to the reproductive function of women. Their exclusion from the job market, in fact, leaves women nonetheless heavily burdened in the sector of reproduction recognized, in accordance with tradition, as their field of expertise. From here, the existence of a new gender balance, traceable in the second phase of the Poggibonsi community’s life. As may be expected, in introducing a procreative function into the group, the representation of the Senegalese in Italy is no longer characterized by the imagination of simple, transitory workers. The significance of this new social dimension within the group may be, in fact, interpreted in a number of ways: above all, as a move toward socialization, in that the migratory experience is now shared with women; in another mode, as a cultural re-territorialization (Appadurai: 1996), brought about by the

contribution of women's customs, habits, and forms of life, distinctive of their native context; finally, as an "entrance into society" through the gradual abandoning of the group's previously exclusive occupational dimension. That which seems to characterize the community's second phase of life, therefore, can be described as a condition of "near-by distance" in regards to Italian society, a condition wherein the support of the host culture is seen to go hand in hand with the sharing of so-imagined "universal" needs. As will be seen, in particular, it is the consideration of women first as mothers, and then as bearers of another cultural tradition that will bring about the normalization of the Senegalese presence in Poggibonsi. In other words, the group's social affirmation, attributable to the second phase of the community's life, seems to depend on the group's qualitative transformation with the arrival of women. In this sense, the central role which women play in this social affirmation will be made further evident in the community's third and final phase, its current phase, in which the inversion of roles of dependence generated by the economic crisis seems today to reveal itself as a reinforcement of the function of gender.

### **3. Variables and Constants of Gender, Modes of Resistance in Times of Crisis.**

If the passage from the first to the second phase of the community's life saw a general realignment of a previously asymmetrical gender relationship, in the community's third, and current phase, the recent economic crisis has produced a new form of disequilibrium, in which women now have "primacy" over men. This redefinition of roles of dependence will be examined in light of the current recession in Italy's economy, characterized today by a high level of unemployment in all sectors. Resulting from the national economy's changing conditions, in fact, many foreigners are suffering what may be thought of as a "double loss"—of both their jobs and legitimacy—as their access to the legal state is dependent upon their being regularly

employed. In fact, due to the current lack of employment possibilities, together with the legal state's consideration of immigrants in terms of their economic utility, a relatively large number of them are now residing in Italy illegally: as the law states (189/2002), in fact, in the case of unemployment lasting longer than the six months provided for reentry into the job market, the presence of foreigners is deemed unlawful, as it is unjustified. In this way, their consideration as a "unit of production"—as comprising a useful workforce for the country—is made particularly evident in times of crisis, when the lack of jobs limits the possibility to remain in accordance with the law. As suggested by the above-described case, the productive function normally invested by men appears, therefore, as a dependent variable, subject to economic factors determined outside of the group. Consequently, in observing the community of Poggibonsi, we are able to witness the ways in which different economic phases facilitate, or, quite the opposite, negate foreigners' possibility of being recognized as regular members of society. In this case, the reduction of modes by which an immigrant may obtain legal recognition seems to rest in direct correlation with the diminution of demand for laborers in the sector of small and medium enterprises. This disempowerment of the productive function carried out by men, quickly created the necessity for Senegalese migrants to find new modes in which to legitimize their presence in Italy. It is as such that the reproductive function embodied by women begins to be thought of as a useful resource in times of crisis. Stated otherwise, with the guarantee of regular work greatly lessened, it is the natural, procreative potential of women that quickly becomes the new road to legality. In particular, it is through the experience of motherhood that women seem today to assume their role of guaranteeing—if only for a "determined amount of time"—connection to the legal state. The prevision within the law, which mandates its suspension in the case of necessary access to medical care - provided to women during pregnancy and for six successive months

after the child's birth- is in fact the mode utilized by both women and their husbands to regain a form of legitimacy<sup>3</sup>. It is in such a way that the state of illegality, owed to the loss of regular work, seems to be compensated by the reproductive capabilities of women, which are protected by the Italian law. Taking this into consideration, the research carried out in the community of Poggibonsi demonstrates how the existence of two paths to achieving legality, each defined by the subject's gender, has as its principle effects the radicalization of sexual roles and the inversion of roles of dependence, producing an "instrumental naturalization" of the procreative function.

The first of the two above-mentioned effects, may be ascribed to the principles of Italian governmental process which recognize in the masculine presence an essentially productive function and in women an assignment that is, above all, reproductive. As a result, we witness the radicalization of the traditional dichotomy of gender, owed to the transformation of one's sex into a "tactical instrument" by which one accesses legality. The primacy given to the productive and/or reproductive function seems to depend, in this sense, on factors determined outside of the community: it is precisely a result of the high unemployment found currently in Poggibonsi that, as evidenced, the procreative capacity of women has come to be identified as a resource in obtaining legitimacy. In particular, the guarantee of access to the legal state through a "self-empowered gender," recasts the reproductive role of women as a *constant* with the group, contrary to the productive capacity of men which must be described as *variable*. The acknowledgment of procreation as a self-sufficient instrument in conserving one's legal condition can, therefore, be seen as a direct cause of the radicalization of the maternal role within

---

3 As stated in article 2, paragraph 2 of the law 286/98, in the case of motherhood, all foreign couples residing together, even if illegal, have the right to request a permission of temporary suspension, the validity of which is motivated by the access to medical care, guaranteed for the first six months of the child's life.

the group. The transformation of motherhood, from an experience aimed toward perpetuation of the group to an effective instrument in securing the group's legitimacy in a migratory context, in fact attributes to women a new social responsibility, producing, consequentially, a new articulation of the roles of dependence traditionally recognized between men and women: it is from this understanding of the procreative surplus as a mode of legitimization that, stated differently, comes to create a new asymmetry of gender, in which women fill the "functional void" left by the economic crisis.

### **3.1 Radical Differences and the Radicalization of Gender Difference.**

That which we must now provide evidence for, is how such an inversion of the roles of dependence does not, at the same time, produce a reinvention of gender balance but, on the contrary, reinforces the traditional imbalance through a radicalization of immigrants' respective roles of dependency. That is, the redefinition of the *functions of gender* produced by the crisis does not seem to signify an inversion of the *structure of gender*, maintained unalterably within the group. As a consequence, the reconsideration of motherhood in a migratory context can be described as a "role extension" in regards to the term's added implications: it is through such an extension of duty that women substitute men in the role of guaranteeing legitimacy.

That which must here be explored, is the way in which this reinforcement of the procreative function goes on to produce a naturalization of motherhood as a woman's main, if not only, area of expertise. In this sense, though the naturalization of the maternal function has its roots in Senegalese culture, it is nonetheless regarded favorably by the Italian legislative system which considers maternity as a "special status," outside the bounds of normal law. In this sense, this normative disbalance in favor of women encourages the reinforcement of gender

asymmetry, denying women the choice to not give birth. Otherwise stated, this added duty now involved in the procreative experience increases the form of control exercised on the female body, which is today considered as a “multipurpose instrument” to be exploited as gainfully as possible. It is as such that the radicalization of gender roles witnessed today in the migratory context reinforces the relationship of power exercised on the female body considered in the past, as it is today, essentially procreative. In this sense, the unwillingness to attribute a “primacy” to women—caused by the crises and encouraged by the law—seems to stem from a consideration of procreation as a simple carrying out of duty. The consideration of female sex as a new source of gaining rights seems to produce, therefore, a *double gender asymmetry*, from which we see the modes of accessing legality multiplied by the procreative surplus embodied by women, for whom the maternal function is furthermore thought of as a given to which she is naturally destined. It is by such a “fact-of-nature” interpretation of motherhood that one avoids the risk of overturning the roles of power on which the gender relationship is based. In this sense, the recognition of sex-based differentiation as a necessary precondition of the function of gender establishes a continuity between the immigrant’s homeland and her place of destination, where, in both cases, to be a woman is, first and foremost, to be a mother. That which changes, in effect, is the meaning attributed to the experience: perpetuation of the group within the Senegalese setting, obtainment of legal recognition in the migratory context. In particular, as has been demonstrated, it is through motherhood’s role extension that today its traditional social function is becoming, at once, also a source of accessing legality.

## **In conclusion**

Taking into consideration the results of the research conducted among the community of Poggibonsi, it is possible to acknowledge the presence of women within the group as constituting a necessary element of a successful migratory experience in Italy. As demonstrated, their importance seems to depend in particular on the given function as “normalize” guaranteed by their procreative potential. As a result, we witness today the multiplication of modes in which one may access legality, together with an overcoming of the social marginality characteristic of foreigners in Italy. The case of the community of Poggibonsi makes evident the direct relationship between women’s arrival into the group and the Senegalese “entrance into society,” moving the group beyond its one-dimensional life, centered exclusively on work. As demonstrated, in fact, the group’s new social dimension rapidly transformed the members’ modes of living in Italy and redefined the group’s representation in the eyes of Italians. It is from the abandonment of this one-dimensional, work-centered life that, in fact, we witness a reconsideration of the Senegalese immigrants as new members of society, playing their part in the country’s period of transformation. In this sense, the reduction of perceived distance between the Senegalese and members of their host society seems to depend, above all, on the group’s ability to redefine itself according to the new needs presented by the arrival of woman, specifically those needs which are tied to maternity. If on one side, the presence of women constitutes an important element of normalization, on the other, as described, it also functions as an instrument of legitimization in times of crisis. In this sense, it is due to a women’s ability to create an additional path to legitimization that she is attributed a central role in the migratory experience. In particular, the exploitation of the group’s female members appears to be directly related to a preconceived notion of gender asymmetry, determined by a sex-based differentiation

of roles. As made evident in this study, it is thanks to the variability of the masculine productive function that men assign a surplus value to women, as their procreative capability may constantly be resorted to in times of crisis. Though the productive dimension seems today to be an insufficient means of obtaining legality, the reproductive dimension, on the other hand, has not undergone any external alteration. In this sense, it is precisely women's unique reproductive capability which results today in the imbalance of gender roles, out of which we recognize an inversion of the roles of dependence within relationships. This imbalance in the favor of women, facilitated by the rules of the Italian government, seems today to result in the tactical utilization of "female potential" as a self-sufficient resource in filling the gap left by the masculine function. Thus we witness the reinforcement of a traditional gender role transformed into a source of obtaining rights. In differentiating between the paths to accessing legality on the basis of gender, the forms of legitimization are, therefore, doubled, assigning to women a central role in the migratory experience. However, the conception of maternity as a women's natural function is in no way overturned by its recognition as a necessary, legitimizing resource: on the contrary, this conception is reinforced within the migratory context. And so we witness the negation of women's primacy in the migratory experience, reducing, in such a way, the legitimizing function taken on by women to a simple question of "gender predisposition." In this sense, the multiplication of functions attributed to motherhood, seems to increase, rather than diminish, masculine control over the female body. Therefore, whether in their native Senegal or in Italy, we must conclude, women are continually reduced to the role of mother; what changes between the two contexts is the value attributed to motherhood: recognized for their predisposition to procreate, women are today regarded as a *gender surplus*, an instrument capable of multiplying the modes in which legality is accessed in the migratory experience.

## Bibliographical References

Andall J. (2000), *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service: the Politics of Black Women in Italy*, Aldershot, Ashgate, London.

Appadurai A. (1996), *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis-London (trad. it. *Modernità in polvere. Dimensioni culturali della globalizzazione*, Meltemi, Roma 2001).

Castagnone E., Ciafaloni F., Donini E., Guasco D., Lanzardo L. (2005), *'Vai e vieni'. Esperienze di migrazione e lavoro di senegalesi tra Louga e Torino*, FrancoAngeli Editore, Milano.

Colombo A., Sciortino G. (2003), a cura di, *Un'immigrazione normale*, Il Mulino.

Dal Lago A. (1999), *Non Persone. L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Feltrinelli, Milano.

Meillessieux C. (1975), *Femmes, greniers et capitaux*, Maspero, Paris (trad. it. *Donne, granai e capitale*, Zanichelli, 1978).

Riccio B (2002), *Toubab and Modou Modou: Italian perceptions of Senegalese transmigrants and the Senegalese Afro-Muslim critique of Italian Society* in Grillo R. e Pratt J., *The politics of recognising difference: Multiculturalism Italian-style*, Aldershot, Ashgate, London.