# CATAPULTED INTO UPWARD EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY: GENDER, AGE AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN MOROCCAN GIRLS SETTLED IN SPAIN

**Sofia Laiz Moreira**

Laboratoire Méditerrannéen de Sociologie, CNRS -Aix Marseille Université

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper explores how inter-generational relations and gender roles in migrant families are being re-adapted to the current crisis context in Spain. It aims to provide conclusions of a research work conducted with Moroccan families arriving in Spain. Through a multisided fieldwork, this study explores how structural determinants and family structure lead to inter-generational arrangements that aim at defining the family migration project in the financial and social crisis in Europe in 2010. The field work conducted with eighteen Moroccan youngsters and their family groups focused closely on migrant intra-family dynamics, and especially on immigrant children's role in the group social mobility project and on family survival strategies in a crisis context. The analysis was carried out from an inter-generational and gender perspective and enabled the exploration of the ways in which migration can bring different influences to bear on different family group members. Tensions between generations and towards traditional survival strategies in the Moroccan family would seem to explain many of these negotiation processes. Findings identify two negotiation scenarios: the second generation's place in original migration project objectives and the descendants' role in family group survival strategies that challenge gender traditional hierarchies.*

**KEYWORDS:** Educational Mobility, Gender, Age, Educational Attainment, Moroccan, Spain

## INTRODUCTION

Just like every family system, the Moroccan family describes a particular structure, where legitimated rights, obligations, values and expectations define gender and inter-generational roles. Family members are connected by solidarity and reciprocity links. El Harras (2004) explained how the changing face of modern Moroccan families challenges traditional values in a constant negotiation process between ancient and new generational ways of understanding family relations. While hierarchies based on sex and age are constantly under discussion, the author remarks how '*reciprocity of supportive exchanges between parents and children resist considerably to the development of individual calculations*'. However, this is often observed more in rural than in urban contexts, as in more traditional families there still prevails an interpretation of family structure based on vertical and utilitarian inter-generational relationships, from parents to children (Bourqia, 2005)[1].

---

[1] Bourqia explained that *« dans les zones rurales où l'on attribue une valeur économique et utilitaire à l'enfant, la contribution de celui-ci à la survie et au bien-être de sa famille est fortement exigée. Cette contribution prend la forme, soit d'une offre de travail gratuit auprès de parents encore jeunes, soit d'une garantie de sécurité à*

The so-called second *generation* was defined by Rumbaut (2004) as being those children born in the land of emigration or brought there before the age of 12, with at least one foreign-born parent. By convention, those children born in the migration host country are defined as the 'proper' second generation while those brought at an early age from abroad are defined as the '1.5 generation' (Rumbaut 2004 in Portes, 2007: 12). In this paper I will focus on those 1.5 generations who have come to the Autonomous Community of Galicia (Spain) through processes of reunification.

Although the use of the term 'second generation' has been widely criticized as it can certainly ascribe a migration process to individuals (descendants) who have not migrated, the term will be properly used in this case as we refer to migrant descendants or '1.5 generations' following a genealogical approach to family migration. The importance of considering the temporal dimension on geographical mobility is due to understanding how young adults' educational and professional projects are connected to family strategies once they migrate.

This paper will therefore aim to analyse how the concepts of time and space overlap with families' integration processes and through generations as the current economical and employment crisis in Spain puts into question the temporal and long-term logics of migration as well as the *who* and *where* of these new mobilities. The analysis will look more closely at the conflict and negotiation between generations as a main relational space in intra-family dynamics. A transnational perspective will contribute significantly in joining both dimensions.

**Methodological Approach**

Aiming at a multi-sited research, fieldwork has been conducted in both places, migrants' place of origin and destination between 2011 and 2015. A concrete territorial scope was thus defined: The Autonomous Community of Galicia in Spain and the Province of Beni Mellal, in Morocco. Eighteen migrant families were then followed and connected in a wide fieldwork (71 interviews) conducted in Galicia and in Beni Mellal's locations, what enabled to include migrants as well as with non-migrant family members. The research collection tool was the in-depth interview, and in some cases, we were able to collect full life stories. Data collection protocol included a minimum of two members of each family group, at least one parent and a descendant. Where possible, the two parents and the youngsters' siblings were also included in the sample. Sampling strategy was based on the contact of youngsters'' living in two main location of high concentration of Moroccan population, one in the province of Pontevedra, the town of Tui, and the other in the Galician province of A Coruña, in the town called Arteixo. The informants (38 individuals) were contacted following the snowball principle, as the first youngsters of Moroccan origin were found in the local secondary schools. Our data analytic approach was based on a multi-sited ethnographical methodology, the study helped to analyse how negotiation processes arise in inter-generational relations when it comes to re-structuring migration projects and family survival strategies in a crisis context. The analysis considered therefore the place of migrants as social actors within a concrete social structure and in a concrete conjectural social situation.

---

*l'âge de la vieillesse. Ce modèle est toujours assez commun à la plupart des zones rurales marocaines dont le niveau de développement socio-économique est particulièrement bas, et dans une moindre mesure, en milieu urbain précaire »* (Bourqia, 2005:47).

Several interviews were therefore also conducted in families' places of origin (33 informants) to extended family members or family members left behind, as well as, in some cases, members of the local community like neighbors or migrants' friends. By doing so, we searched for explanations that helped us to understand, on the one hand, migrants' projects, goals and expectations when building strategic pathways to social mobility by migration and on the other hand, the influence of origin societies' structural determinants in their decision to migrate.

**Gender, Age and Children's Participation in Family Migration Experience**

When analysing migration processes, Zlotnik (1995) describes a number of implications between migrations and family dynamics, as being the impact of migration on household composition, on the members 'left behind' and on marriage and couple stability (in Zontini 2010: 34).

While focusing on children's participation in migration processes in a temporary dimension, different sibling roles are confirmed again and again. It is not new that age and gender hierarchies determine children's responsibility towards reciprocity and solidarity channels in the Moroccan family structure. Despite this, different families and different contexts of origin help to shape different models of intergenerational obligations. In the case of those families coming from Beni Mellal a common profile has been observed. Evidence has showed that family groups coming from different rural locations usually comprise a high number of descendants –with three children minimum, and more than four the norm–. It is therefore common to find a wide age gap between the eldest and youngest children.

Valenzuela has developed a typology of immigrant children's roles within immigrant families in California (Valenzuela; 1999). Accordingly, as per Valenzuela's categories, when analyzing the role of children in Beni Mellal's families, older boys usually describe a '*parent-like*' or '*surrogated*' responsibility, as they contribute to the family's income and can count on the group's support when deciding on younger brothers' and sisters' lives. By way of contrast, middle children usually help with the education and care of younger siblings at school, as, while they are still minors, they are closer to the domestic sphere and can mediate in language interpreting. This second role is identified by Valenzuela as one of being 'tutors' or '*mediators*' between the family and the education system.

Different siblings' roles are also observed when we analyse gender hierarchies. While boys are guided towards the public domain and enjoy a rich social life whose origin lies in the separation between the reproductive and productive spheres, girls are mainly attributed to the domestic scene. Pottier (1993) has already worked on the gendered differentiation of tasks within maghreb's families settled in France, pointing out that « …*dès sa prime enfance, la fillette apprend, en secondant sa mère dans les travaux domestiques, son futur rôle d'épouse et de mère tandis que le garçon (après avoir entretenu des liens très étroits avec sa mère jusqu'à l'âge de sept ans), sera pris en charge par son père pour s'occuper de la gestion et de l'avenir de la famille* » (Pottier, 1993:182).

Accordingly, findings have helped to confirm that a gendered education within Beni Mellal's families give boys a broader scope while girls are educated to stay in the private domain. However, this vision can be much more complex than it seems, as it makes reference to analysis perceptions and interpretations that may lead to stereotyping and objectifying, in the way that Abu-Lughod states with regard to the perception of Muslim women in the west (Abu-Lughod,

2013), in which the notions of "oppression", "election" and "freedom" are used from an occidental prism that tends to legitamise political discourse.

In the following paraghraph I will try to demonstrate how this can indirectly influence in social mobility projects' restructuration and new gender negotiations within the Moroccan family.

**The Impact of Gender Hierarchies on Children's Educational Strategies and Professional Pathways**

Boukhobza (2005) has already worked on how girls from Maghreb origin in France have turned to be visible within school context as they obtain a better performance in comparison to their brothers. Although previous works have already noted the impact of family structure in girls' better school performance, not many studies have deepened in how this process can interfere in migrant family's survival strategies when male members' productive role is blocked by structural determinants in the place of settlement.

Meanwhile, the analysis of educational pathways in Beni Mellal's children settled in Galicia has contributed to reveal that different sibling roles within Moroccan immigrant families can also have an influence on children's educational achievement. Hence, family mandates and gender segregation seem to negatively influence boys' educational pathways after migration, as they contribute to their early drop out from school and push them into the productive sphere. This is also explained by the fact that boys are more exposed to certain types of distraction and spend more time in the public sphere than girls. Meanwhile, findings reveal girls' advantage in gender-differentiated treatment and with regard to educational achievement. Kadri (2007) has remarked that in Maghreb's societies gender roles block girls' school achievement. Although it has been noticed that domestic duties in non-migrant girls -still in migrant's hometown- explained girls' analphabetism rates, this seems to work in the way around in the case of immigrant children. Thus, while productive obligations fall to boys and tend to push them into an immediate job search after compulsory education, girls seem to be able to combine family obligations and studies to continue longer educational pathways. Accordingly, young migrant boys rarely progress their career development and usually fall back on precarious and informal parents' traditional activity while girls are succeeding in accessing higher education diplomas. This is also explained by the ways in which pioneer migrants -heads of household- have been inserted into the so-called hosting societies. A segmented integration of first-generation fathers −without exception, inserted in the street selling sector− will therefore also influence in family earnings and consequently in the second generation's educational achievement and labour insertion when Galicia's youth unemployment rates has nearly reached the 50%.

On the other hand, and while deepening in girls' motivations to longer educational pathways, testimonies bore a strong relation to gaining more respect and status within the family structure:

> *I don't know how to explain it; it is something about respect, maybe about… status. Prestige, In the case of families coming from the Maghreb, they all present the same profile, boys stop studying, girls continue. Because girls want this freedom, more freedom than they have. Boys don't, what they want is money and a social level. Because they already enjoy this freedom, they don't have to fight for it…*

> Beni Mellal's girl, 24 years old, arrived at 8 years old, is studying at university.

In this regard, while girls find, through education, the shuttle to gain status within the family and community recognition, boys are segmented into low-qualified pathways, usually ending with an IPCP (Initial Professional Qualification Program). Accordingly, findings show a qualification gap between Moroccan girls and boys settled in Galicia and with a migration background. This same trend has already been shown by other studies in Spain that support the demystification of Moroccan families' restriction on girls' education, showing a larger Moroccan female participation in secondary and tertiary levels compared to that of boys (Colectivo Ioé, 2004). Thus, a generational change seems to take place somehow within family re-accommodation while facing integration process.

The interest of such social phenomena is due to the recognition of a significant impact of family migration on gendered children's pathways. Although school dropout rates suppose a serious problem in Moroccan rural areas, the opportunity to school promotion in Beni Mellal's immigrant girls settled in Galicia seems to work as an upward social mobility process after migration.

Thus, the distance observed in boys and girl's achievement levels can be interpreted as the social mobility *potentiality* or capability to succeed in obtaining a better job than the first-generation migrants. Contrary to traditional first-generation mandates, girls are experiencing a high qualification process while their brothers are left in low-qualified professional trajectories. At the same time, girls' success in obtaining university diplomas should certainly work as a real process of agency within family structure while also trespassing on gender hierarchies

Despite this, significant findings describe the ways in which structural determinants can influence on immigrant children labour insertion although their potentiality to upward mobility. Accordingly, although qualification and professional gap between generations are made more concrete in the case of Beni Mellal's community taking into account a majority of analphabet mothers and primary education level fathers, agency is not working in the way it could be expected. Taking into account the Galician labour market structure and ethno stratified channels into professional insertion, girls are being employed in sectors which have been less impacted by the financial crash (mainly in domestic and care services as well as within food industry activities). Although graduated in specialized fields girls are rarely gaining work that meets the level of qualifications acquired. Thus, while achieving university diplomas, social mobility strategies do not correspond to the labour trajectories traced.

On the other hand, although this evident blockage, the better insertion of girls is helping in a re-adaptation of gendered siblings' roles as girls are now playing an active part in family survival strategies and in family finances. Thus, in contrast to family gender hierarchies, the current crisis situation is leading to a re-definition of the traditional family model now placing girls in a '*surrogate parents' role*'. However, while agency is observed within the family structure and in terms of qualification, they hardly promote in terms of occupation.

**Structural and Symbolic Determinants of Girls' Agency**

Comparative analysis based on fifteen in depth-interviews with non-migrant family members (second-generation cousins, uncles/aunts and grandparents) still settled in the migrants' home towns has revealed that migrant families show significantly more rigid gender and age hierarchies than non-migrant ones.

When considering agency capabilities, findings show an ethno-stratified insertion of Moroccan girls into jobs related to '*feminized*' sectors. Although labour market's structure in Galicia after the financial crash certainly influences girls' placement into the labour market, symbolic elements are also interfering in this process. Together with these two variables, the influence of tradition and family restrictions to woman's activity are also blocking girls' agency. The idea of '*hchouma',* which makes reference to shameful feelings while trespassing these restrictions based on family honour, explains how girls are also choosing more feminized duties. At the same time, this somehow relieves parents' and eldest brothers' concern:

> (…) if she works as cleaner or similar it is OK, but she cannot work in a bar or night club, where she serves alcohol or similar things, cause a drunk man can hurt her or tell her things, you don't want your sister to suffer that, that is already learnt at home, in religion.

> Moroccan boy, 24 years old, brother of 20 years old girl, unemployed, arrived at 12.

When inserted into a context with a higher equity between genders this can be seen as a threat to the Moroccan family traditional structure. The struggle to maintain certain traditional restrictions related to traditional family hierarchies is usually translated into conflict between the generations. Gender segregation also transcends the professional sphere when girls' choices are submitted for fathers' and eldest brothers' approval. Structural and cultural limitations are indeed restricting the activation of girls' human capital.

While the current crisis in Spain shows evidence of serious difficulties and partial failure in initial family migratory projects, inter-generational arrangements are occurring when the idea of return is considered. The option of reducing family costs by returning home where at least housing is assured is becoming the subject of inter-generational negotiation.

On one hand, the idea of a first-generation return seems to be blocked by immigrant children, still of school age, who have already lost the required command of reading and writing in Arabic that would ensure a satisfactory re-integration into the education system in the place of origin. There are, however, emerging traces of new group return migration strategies built upon the resources of Spanish schools in Morocco, to avoid the interruption of educational pathways.

Findings have shown that the current crisis reinforces and re-models what Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc (1994) called the 'transnational social fields' into which the Moroccan migration system is being inserted. This re-definition does not change the idea of prioritizing circular migrations over and above permanent settlement, but reveals a contra-model to the traditional Moroccan migration system, where the male head of household was the one who stayed for years in the emigration destination while wife and children waited in the homeland. The changing face of the migratory model describes the idea of a transnational leaving of families, who are being separated not only across generations and trans-locations by time and space, but also by a new inter-generational convention.

This concept of a transnational social field in particular softens the idea of a permanent stay when defined as 'multi-stranded social relations that link places of origin and settlement'. The initial idea of classic transnational family model in the Moroccan migration system is due to the idea of maintaining first pioneers' transnational lives, then first-generation couples' return –parents– while grown-up second generations, already inserted in the labour market, would contribute to family survival transnationally being settled in the hosting society. The current

unemployment situation, with a great impact on youth employment- is now leading to the re-adaptation of the initial schema as it blocks younger generations' insertion and family social mobility strategies, turning the transnational project based on generational circular motilities[2] upside down.

While migrant families' projects are still aiming at maintaining legal residence permits based on the idea of circularity, the second generation's insertion strategy now lies in a temporary return. First-generation parents are staying in the emigration destination as their participation in this circularity is hampered by having small children of school age.

On the other hand, when analysing the gender aspects of this younger generation's temporary return projects, findings reveal a confrontation with girls' future expectations, who find plenty more professional opportunities in the hosting society than in their home towns. Gaining more freedom and status while gaining social recognition within the ethnic community, as well as within the family structure (as they participate more than their brothers in supporting the family financially), has also influenced girls' desire to settle in Galicia, while boys are usually considering the option of returning to the homeland, or at the very least, planning a circular migration schema.

Thus, while boys are currently searching for different strategies that can consolidate the idea of temporary return, girls show a clear opposition. Although these return projects seem to be just an intention as they haven't been consolidated in any of the studied families, the attitudes towards return are quite differentiated. One of the main elements that determines the lack of solidity in this idea lies in the difficulties of re-constructing the social mobility project at migrants' place of origin, usually based on starting an independent business. In contrast, when thinking about labour insertion in the young adults' home town the real panorama doesn't show many more raised expectations to those precarious conditions that caused the family to migrate in the first place, despite the recognized development in local frameworks in the last 20 years. On the other hand, the lack of education diplomas does not enable real occupational mobility when searching for a job. Therefore, the assumption of social mobility failure as the result of the migration project is somehow also holding back young adult boys' return and pushing them towards the idea of turning to the transnational social networks settled in other European destinations, which coincide in most families in kinship networks and social capital settled in France.

## CONCLUSIONS

Two main negotiation processes take place:

i) That of girls' agency in the family structure through cultural capital acquisition and better job insertion,

ii) That of inter-generational and gender gaps around the idea of return. On the other hand, my findings helped to identify three main variables that influence young adult labour insertion:

---

[2] The term 'generational mobilities' is used meaning the move of members of the same family and from different generations, moving across a transnational space.

i) Family structure mandates,

ii) Structural determinants –public policies, social and economic situation in Galicia,

iii) Parents' incorporation into the labour market.

Family re-arrangements in a crisis context are showing how several individual and collective objectives are connected in inter-generational and gender negotiation processes. Family members are dealing with different attitudes towards staying or returning, towards moving or waiting, and towards the idea of re-adapting the traditional family into a more flexible model where gender and generational changes can be placed.

On one hand, girls are being promoted within the family structure through obtaining better educational achievements and professional results – an undesired effect of families' traditional values and the division between the productive and reproductive spheres in children education.

On the other, signs of failure in the initial social mobility project based on migration are showing up in boys, who were, at the time of the study, thinking of looking for work in their home towns or in other kinship members' locations around Europe, maximizing migration transnational bonds and ethnic social capital. What seems clear is that gender tends to separate attitudes towards staying or returning.

Thus, while interpreting temporary and spatial dimensions, findings have contributed to an understanding of the re-definition of individual and group expectations towards initial migration project objectives. Significant conclusions are being drawn about how traditional values and the family's structure struggle to remain unmodified as the migration project is being re-formulated. Hence, findings reveal how inter-generational disagreement around the idea of return tends to place generations and genders along a transnational social space.

## REFERENCES

Abel Valenzuela, JR (1999): Gender roles and settlement activities among children and their immigrant families. *American Behavioral Scientist*. 1999 42:720

Bakewell, O.; de Haas, H;,Kubal, A (2011): *Migration systems, pioneers and the role of agency.* IMI Working Papers.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation- States*. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers.

Boukhobza, N (2005): L'émergence des "burettes" en "Femmes: femmes et société", *Science Humanines.* Hors-serie special- novembre –decembre 2005, nº4.

Boukhobza, N. (2005) Les filles naissent après les garçons Représentations sociales des populations d'origine maghrébine en France. *Revue européenne des migrations internationales.* vol. 21 - n°1 (2005) Femmes, genre, migration et mobilités.

El Harras, M. (2004): Marruecos, la diversificación de las estructuras y relaciones familiares en López y Berriane: *Atlas de la inmigración marroquí.* Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

Fawcett, J. (1989): Networks, linkages and migration systems. *International Migration Review*, 23 (3).

Levitt, P. & Schiller, N. (2004): Conceptualizing Simultuneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society'. *Center for Migration Studies of New York*. ZMR. Volume 38 Number 3:1002-1039.

Orellana, M., Thorne, B. Chee, A. & Lam, W. (2001) Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration. *Social problems*, Vol 48. No.4; pages 572-591.

Portes, A.; Celaya, Vickstrom and Aparicio (2011) *Who Are We? Parental Influences on Self-identities and Self-esteem of Second Generation Youths in Spain.*

Pottier, C. (1993) La « fabrication » sociale de médiateurs culturels : le cas de jeunes filles d'origine maghrébine In: *Revue européenne de migrations internationales*. Vol. 9 N°3. Trajets générationnels – Immigrés et « ethniques », France et Québec. pp. 177-191.

Vertovec (2004): Trends and Impacts of Migrant Transnationalism. Centre on Migration, *Policy and Society Working Paper No. 3*, University of Oxford, 2004.

White, A., Ní Laoire, C., Tyrrell, N. & Carpena-Mendez, J. (2011) 'Children's Roles in Transnational Migration', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37(8): 1159-1170

Zontini, E., 2010. Enabling and constraining aspects of social capital in migrant families: ethnicity, gender and generation *Ethnic And Racial Studies*. 33(5), 816-831.