

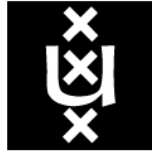
# EARLY MARRIAGE IN RURAL KOLDA- SENEGAL WHOSE CHOICE?



## Examining young women and men's agency strategies

A case study exploring understandings and preferences  
around marriage and family formation

**Lisa Juanola van Keizerswaard**



UNIVERSITY OF AMSTERDAM

Graduate School of Social Sciences

In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the

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Name: Lisa Juanola van Keizerswaard

UVA ID: 11125837

Email: [lisajuanola@gmail.com](mailto:lisajuanola@gmail.com)

Date:

Word Count: 32893

Supervisor: Dr. Esther Miedema

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

GPIO : Governance and Inclusive Development

Second Reader: Michaela Hordijk

To every woman that has inspired me along this journey  
In particular, to my mum, my greatest inspiration and referent

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I believe that achievements are always collective. This thesis has been without a doubt a collective effort, that has counted with the contribution of many.

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It was also in Nicaragua where my engagement with SRHR started. My learnings within the FCAM-family are the base of this thesis. Thanks to Carla and Claudia for trusting me, and to Bertha, for sharing all the knowledge and for being my most inspiring activist-referent.

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As 'we' say in Senegal: *'On est ensemble'*

## PREFACE

This thesis is the final project that symbolizes the closure of a learning cycle, the one I have been through during the entire Research Master. This one cycle is not isolated from a much longer journey. Not only because each new experience builds on our previous life learning process, but because the two years of this endeavour have brought together my most precious experiences, deeper interests and previously acquired knowledge. I am convinced that learning is not about acquiring knowledge, but connecting your past, present and future passions, interests and knowledge.

These two last years have been a 'connective-learning cycle' that symbolically culminates with this thesis. The deep readings on post-development theory and feminism have provided me a new lens through which I much better understand discourses that surrounded me during my previous years in Latin America. This cycle has drawn the intellectual path I want to further walk on and explore. A path that goes beyond the development sector, building on my broader political ontology. I have been able to connect and develop together my political positions in my home country (Spain), with my visions of the 'development sector', and my experiences with feminist movements. All this, in the city of Amsterdam, where my mum is from, and at the University of Amsterdam, where both of my parents studied. Through the location, my intellectual and personal paths have beautifully merged.

The choice of the topic for this thesis has, of course, not been arbitrary. Before enrolling at the UvA I worked at the Central American Fund for Women, where I got particularly engaged with women's rights movements advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), especially the right to safe abortion. While writing the proposal for this thesis, I was working as an intern at the Health and Aids Division of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for the Dutch SRHR agenda. As early marriage is now a key priority within SRHR sector, the topic was chosen with the aim to further 'specialize' in that area. Moreover, it allowed connecting with my background on psychology (sexuality and childhood studies), enhancing even more this 'connective-learning' process.

Such a relevant learning cycle could not be closed without making visible, with written words, a little reflection of what it has meant. Moreover, I even feel it is my duty to start with an exercise of personal openness. This thesis focuses on personal meanings and experiences on topics as intimate as sexuality. If the contexts, motivations and experiences of young women and men in this study, influence their understandings of social relations and social phenomena, mine also influence the entire thesis. Hence, with this reflection I hope the reader gets an idea to contextualize myself and the moment in which I have written this thesis.

Finally, I find it important to humbly acknowledge that the main goal of the study is obtaining a Research Master, hence, it is a learning product. However, I have put strong efforts, also with the will that this work becomes a solid base on which to build further learning, hopefully in the form of a professional career.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine (West African Coin)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
ENDA JA	ENDA Jeunesse Action
I	Interview
ICWR	International Center for Research on Women
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
SDG's	Sustainable Development Goals
SQ	Sub-Question
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRI	Sexual Rights Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## ABSTRACT

Early marriage has positioned in the global development agenda as a harmful practice to be ended. The human rights based approach addressing early marriage has been criticized by scholars for decontextualizing young women's lives and portraying them only as passive victims, constructing an unhelpful dichotomy of 'victim' versus 'violateur'. Moreover, the voice of young women experiencing early marriage is largely absent from literature, which has been mainly focused on causes and consequences of the practice. Engaging in the debate on universalism-relativism, this thesis aims to uncover decision-making processes that inform young women and men's preferences around whether, when and who to marry by exploring local understandings around marriage, family (formation) and sexuality. The thesis presents the results of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation conducted in ten rural communities in Kolda (Senegal). The main findings which indicate that young women and men: i) have a functional view of family and marriage, seen as the main source of economic and social support, ii) base their preferences around marriage on a rational analysis of their livelihood opportunities rather than on socially constructed variables like age, and iii) opt for accommodation and negotiation as agency strategies to participate in marriage decisions without risking their futures. The study argues that these findings are strongly related with implicit gender relations. Even more, findings suggest that the core of the concerns with regard to early marriages appear to relate to changes in relations between young women and men that confront long established gender arrangements. The study concludes that young women and men can have an active role in the practice of early marriage and calls for local contextualization to base early marriage policies and interventions on young women and men's needs. The 18 years old boundary of the human rights approach risks ignoring the agency of some young women, and deny protection to others. A comprehensive approach to early marriage requires a relational perspective of gender.

**Key words-** Early marriage, agency, young women and men, Senegal, relativism, gender relations

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

*'Each year, 15 million girls are married before the age of 18. That is 28 girls every minute. One every two seconds'*

Girls not Brides Alliance, 2016



Picture 1: Visit of young women to ENDA JA office in Kolda town

The Girls not Brides Alliance is a global partnership of more than 700 civil society organizations from over 90 countries the goal of which is to end 'child marriages' worldwide. This alliance, started in 2011, is indicative of the consolidation of 'child marriage' as a key priority within the international development agenda. This study takes place within this context of 'child marriage' as a current top priority. In this introductory chapter, I present the problem statement and knowledge gap that I aim to address. Moreover, I contextualize the study within the Her Choice Alliance project and I provide an overview of the thesis through an outline of the upcoming chapters.

## 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

Analysis of marriage trends have pushed the global sense of urgency to address early marriage. Development actors highlight that if current trends continue, the total number of women married before the age of 18 will grow from more than 700 million to approximately 950 million by 2030 and nearly 1.2 billion by 2050 (UNICEF, 2013). Moreover, data indicates that almost half of the world's child brides in 2050 will be African due to a growing child population combined with a slow decline in the practice of early marriage (UNICEF, 2015). While trends vary significantly between and within countries and regions as well as between socioeconomic groups, data puts Sub-Saharan Africa and particularly Western Africa in the spotlight (UNICEF, 2015). In Senegal, 'nearly one out of three girls is married as a child' (UNICEF, 2016). Not only is West Africa a region with high child marriage rates, but -- together with Central Africa -- also with the highest adolescent birth rates, and one characterized by the lowest use of reproductive health services.

Building on these marriage trends, the dominant discourse on early marriage has been framed by the international development actors who refer to 'child marriage'<sup>1</sup> as a harmful practice that needs to be eliminated. 'Child marriage' is seen as violation of human rights, particularly girls' rights to health, education, equality and to live free from violence. However, in that context, critics to this dominant human rights based approach have emerged. Critics argue that this perspective on 'child marriage' is decontextualized and therefore portrays young women only and always as passive victims that 'need to be rescued'. Archambault (2011), Callaghan (2016), Murphy Graham (2015) and Karisa (2016) suggest that the dominant discourse obscures complex structural and socioeconomic factors that perpetuate the practice, and ignores young women and men's participation around marriage decisions. These argumentations resonate with epistemological and theoretical critics to the universality of the concept of human rights (eg. Donnelly, 1984),

Moreover, scholars have highlighted that early marriage is under-researched, with the limited available literature largely produced by (or with) global development agencies and international non-governmental organizations (Camfield & Tafere, 2011). Studies on early marriage tend to focus on the causes and consequences, giving less attention to the agency of youth and the decision-making processes that inform their actions (Murphy Graham and Leal, 2015; Mathur et al. 2003; Myers and Rowan 2011). Specific literature on early marriage in African countries is largely dominated by works that explore the harmful effects of the practice on the young victims as well as on family, society and the economy (Walker, 2012). There is a knowledge gap in understanding girls desires and agency around marriage, sexuality and family formation (Greene, 2014). The 'voice' of women (particularly African women) who experience early marriage is largely absent from literature (Callaghan, 2015). Also, literature reviews stress the need to examine early marriage using a gender lens that focuses on the relational aspect of the process of family formation, particularly in terms of the significant

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<sup>1</sup> In quotation marks because it is not the term used within this study.

differentials between men and women in terms of decision-making around marriage, sexual activity and childbearing (ICWR & UNICEF, 2015)

Building on the criticism concerning human rights-based approaches to early marriage, and the knowledge gaps identified in early marriage literature, the current study aims to explore young women and men's views and preferences around marriage, family formation and sexuality. This investigation is done in the form of a case study as it allows a deeper exploration of local understandings with a stronger local contextualization. By grasping what young women and men think and want in terms of marriage and family formation, the study aims to identify forms of agency (if any) among youth in rural Kolda, Senegal.

## **1.2 HER CHOICE ALLIANCE**

The study took place within the framework of the Her Choice program, an alliance of four organizations based in the Netherlands whose main goal is 'to support the creation of child marriage-free communities in which girls and young women are free to decide if, when and whom to marry'(Her Choice Alliance, 2016). The program runs from January 2016 until December 2020 in eleven countries, one of which is Senegal. The University of Amsterdam is one of the partners and is leading the research and learning work.

In each country, the alliance works with local partner organisations. All the primary data of the present study has been collected while embedded in one of the local partners in Senegal, ENDA Jeunesse Action, particularly within the team of the local office in Kolda city. The organization is responsible for executing the Her Choice Program in the department of Kolda. The Her Choice program is based on six main interventions: investing in girls; keeping girls in school; improving access to youth-friendly SRHR services for girls; strengthening the economic security of girls and their families; transforming social norms and traditional practices; and creating and enabling legal and policy environment on preventing child marriage.

While being embedded in the alliance structure, the present study was independent. The focus, questions, theoretical insights were built aside of the program. However, it is relevant to emphasize this relation, to contextualize the organizational framework under which the study has taken place.

## **1.3 THESIS OUTLINE**

The present thesis is organized as follows. After this introduction, the second chapter presents the theoretical framework that has guided the study. The theoretical chapter argues why the term early marriage is used, then reflect on the broader debate of universalism and relativism and the implications the human rights approach in addressing and studying early marriage. After that, the gender theoretical framework is presented as well as the conceptualization of agency.

Chapter three details the research design, the research question that the study aims to answer, as well as all the methods and tools used to collect and analyse primary qualitative and



quantitative data. This chapter also reflects on the quality of the data, ethical considerations and research limitations.

Before presenting the findings, the fourth chapter briefly describes the research location, focusing on three elements that characterize rural populations in Kolda: ethnicity, language and religion. Moreover, to enrich the picture of the research context specific data on local early marriage trend is presented.

The findings of the study are organized along three chapters (five, six and seven). First, in chapter five, young women and men's views of marriage and family, as well as their marriage and family formation preferences are presented. This chapter aims to explain the functional view that young women and men have of both family and marriage and how that links to their marriage desires. Chapter six focuses on defining when marriages and pregnancies become a source of concern. In other words, when are marriages and pregnancies defined as 'early'. Because sexuality appears as a key factor influences the delimitation of when marriages and pregnancies are considered 'early', the chapter also presents understandings around sexuality. Having provided this picture, the last empirical chapter, the seventh, describes who takes marriage decisions and how, building on young women and men's narratives. By doing so, the chapter highlights what appear to be the main agency strategies among young women and men in relation to decisions around when and who to marry.

Young women and men's narratives did not explicitly engage with the concept/idea of 'gender'. However, gender arrangements appeared implicit in young women and men's views and preferences on marriage, family (formation) and sexuality, as well as in young women and men's forms of exercising agency around marriage decisions. Therefore, chapter eight, the discussion chapter, covers the influence of gender relations. The discussion describes community gender arrangements, highlighting changes in gender relations and the implications of these changes.

Finally, the thesis closes with the conclusion in chapter nine, which briefly summarizes the answer to the main research question. This answer is complemented with a theoretical reflection on the universalism versus relativism framework, as well as with five recommendations for policy and practice in the form of reflections.

## 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*'The binaries structuring popular discourses of early marriage obscure structural processes that give rise to early marriage and demand important policy attention'*

Archambault, 2011, p.641

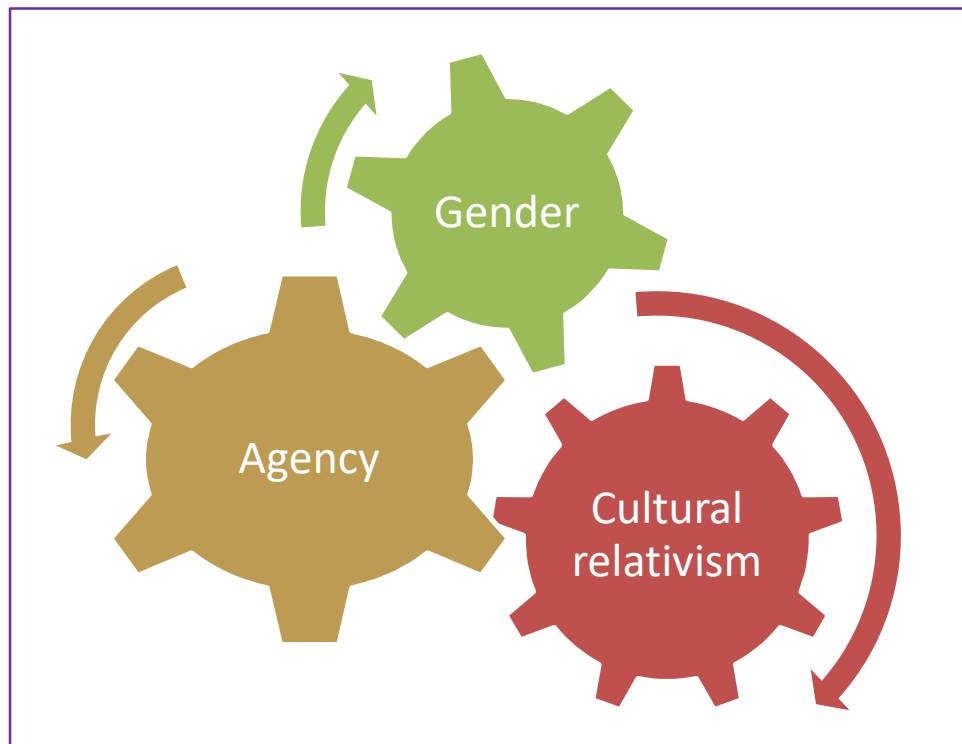


Figure 1: The three main concepts that form the theoretical framework of this study

In this chapter, I present the main theoretical frameworks and debates that this study builds on and seeks to contribute to. First, I explain why the term 'early marriage' is used in this thesis. Second, I reflect on the broader debates on universalism versus (cultural) relativism and the implications of the concept of universal human rights in the theoretical and practical approaches to early marriage. Third, I discuss the notion of agency, engaging with various typologies. Finally, the last section describes the framework that guides the gender analysis in the study.

## 2.1 EARLY MARRIAGE: A FLEXIBLE AND INCLUSIVE TERM

Prior to presenting the theoretical framework that guides the study, this sub-section aims to define the central concept in this study (early marriage). To that end, I reflect on the underlying assumptions of different terms to then justify why 'early marriage' is preferred in this study.

Academic and programmatic literature, researchers, policy-makers and practitioners use different terms, which despite being sometimes interpreted as synonymous, are reflective of different underlying assumptions and conceptions. 'Early marriage', 'child marriage' and 'forced marriage' are used separately as well as in combination: 'early and forced marriage', 'child and forced marriage', and 'child, early and forced marriage' (SRI, 2013). 'Child marriage' is now the most common term used by INGOs for being more concrete and more likely to receive media and policy attention (SRI, 2013). However, in this study, I opt for early marriage as a more suitable term for the purpose of the present study.

As there is no universal definition of 'child', there is not a universal accepted definition of child marriage. A 'child' is usually defined in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states that 'a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years', but specifies 'unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (UN, 1989, Article 1). Not all countries define the full age at eighteen years old. In Senegal, although the age of majority is 18, the legal age to marry is 16 for women and 18 for men (Code de la Famille Senegalese, 2000, Article 314 and 111). The Committee on the Rights to the Child attempts to address the differences between countries in the legal age to marry by recommending all states to set the minimum age to marriage for women and men, with and without parental consent, to 18 years old (CRC/GC/2003/4, CRC/C/GC/13). Hence, child marriage is widely understood as the marriage or union between two people in which one or both parties are younger than 18 years old (UNFPA, 2012). Many organisations consider child marriage to equal a forced marriage (SRI, 2013), arguing that 'children', given their age, are not able to give free, prior and informed consent to marriage (UNFPA, 2012). As is stated in a thematic report on servile marriage by the Human Rights Council, for example, 'under international human rights law, a child cannot provide informed consent to a marriage' (A/HRC/21/41).

Early marriage has been often been interpreted and used as synonymous with 'child marriage,' and the two terms have been used interchangeably without noticeable distinction (SRI, 2013). However, the term 'early marriage' is more flexible as it is not per definition tied to age. 'Early' can refer to other factors that could make a person unready to consent to marriage such as the individual's level of development – physical, emotional, sexual, psychosocial -- education, and/or aspirations or information about life options. In other words, early marriage is defined in relation to evolving capacities (SRI,2013). Evolving capacities is a concept also present in the CRC, which recognises that children have different maturities and decision-making abilities and that the child's right to make certain decisions should be able to reflect his/her particular abilities.

Consequently, the definition of what is 'forced' is more flexible when using the term 'early' marriage than with 'child' marriage. Early marriages are not equated with forced marriages. 'Early marriage' can also refer to cases that are deemed early in relation to, for example, educational attainment, but not forced. In other words, when using the notion 'child marriage' any bride who is 17 years old is automatically considered forced, whereas the term early marriage allows greater nuances in forms of giving consent. At the same time, the term early marriage can also refer to cases in which one or both the spouses are unable to make free and informed consent, despite being older than 18 years old. Summing up, defining consent in relation to forced marriage is complex and the flexibility of the term 'early marriage' allows for recognition of these complexities (Bunting et al., 2016).

The flexibility and greater inclusiveness of the term make it more suitable for this study for two main reasons. First, as the study aims to explore forms of agency, assuming that all marriages are forced would mean assuming a priori that young men and women do not and cannot exercise any agency. Second, to explore young women and men's preferences around marriage, family formation and sexuality, the target group are not only married young women and men under 18 years old, but all young women and men, married and unmarried, within a broader age range; teenagers as well and youth in their mid and late twenties.

Moreover, the use of the term early marriage is more in line with the constructivist ontology of this study, as well as with the theoretical position I depart from within the universalism versus relativism debate. This debate, explored in the following section, is close to an epistemic debate, but in this study serves as a theoretical framework to explore the universality of early marriage as a harmful practice. For the reasons sketched above, the more neutral term of 'early marriage' is given preference in this study.

## **2.2 UNIVERSALISM VS RELATIVISM**

'Since its proclamation in 1948, human rights have been subject to speculation as to whether such rights can indeed be truly universal. Such questioning of the universality of human rights has been based, to a large extent, both on the role of culture and its moral capacity to determine priorities, and on the confrontation between the individual and the system in the communal society' (Blackburn, 2011, p.7)

International development actors have tended to frame early marriage as a violation of human rights, particularly children and women's rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination and to live free from violence and exploitation (UNICEF, 2015; Girls not Brides, 2016). The examination of the universality of the rights can be seen as a questioning of the identification of early marriage as a universally harmful practice. Given the relevance of the broader theoretical debate regarding universalism versus (cultural) relativism for the present study on early marriage, the section below reflects on the underlying assumptions and notions within both main strands of thought and clarifies on which insights the study aims to build on.

### 2.2.1 UNIVERSALISM: EARLY MARRIAGE AS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION IN ITSELF

Modern human rights law is rooted in the notion of universalism. The universalist perspective holds that there is an underlying human unity which entitles all individuals, regardless of their cultural or regional antecedents, to certain basic minimal rights (Zechener E, 1997). Therefore, radical universalism defends that culture is irrelevant to the validity of moral rights and rules, which are universally valid (Donnelly, 1984). Fundamental rights apply to all people across cultures, a perspective that has been championed by human rights activists and some Western feminists and academics (Donnelly, 1984). The traditional universalist perspective is based on three major jurisprudential theories: natural law, rationalism and positivism (Dworkin, 1978). More recently, other theories such as the human capabilities theory have proposed new philosophical foundations for the idea of universality of human rights (Nussbaum, 1993; Sen, 1993). Capabilities theorists look for commonalities among cultures, religions and philosophical traditions, among men and women and use those commonalities to argue that all individuals must have at least some minimum rights necessary for human functioning (Nussbaum, 1993).

Since the 1960s early marriage has been a subject of international human rights regulations (UN Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, 1962; CEDAW, 1979; CRC, 1989). International organizations have since advocated for a rights-based approach where early marriage is seen as a human rights violation in and of its self (UNICEF, 2001). Within women's and children's movements and scholarship, the idea that early marriage constituted a human rights violation gained traction only later (UNICEF, 2001; Bunting 2005; Karisa, 2016). It is recent, particularly in the last decade, that the issue has received increased attention and positioning in the international development agenda as a harmful practice to be eliminated (Karisa, 2016). The universalist perspective builds on the belief that 'harmful practices' can be determined objectively according to universal standards. From this perspective, practices such as early marriage or female genital mutilation violate universal rights (Karisa, 2016), and are therefore labelled as 'harmful' to focus on its elimination (Packer, 2002). The new Sustainable Development Goals include, in relation to the goal 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' the following target:

'Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation' (Target 3, Sustainable Development Goal 5).

As early marriage positioned in the international development agenda as a human rights violation, critics emerged. The universalist/human rights approach to early marriage has been criticised for obscuring the structural factors that perpetuate the practice and ignoring social, cultural and economic dimensions (Bunting, 2005; Archambault, 2011). Critics argue that the de-contextualization of women's lives creates unhelpful dichotomies of victim versus violator that stabilize complex and dynamic subjectivities (Archambault, 2011), and that the universalizing concepts of women's rights are insufficient to understand the complex positioning of women in contexts where gender roles are highly restrictive and culturally over-determined (Callaghan, 2015). These critics also highlight that narrow human rights based

analysis miss the complexity of marriage and age and ignore cultural constructions of childhood that should be considered in early marriage studies (Bunting, 2005). From this perspective, the universalist/ human rights approach is too focused on the assumptions in targeting early marriage as human rights violations per se and does not pay attention to the particular consequences for young women's health and education (Bunting, 2005).

## 2.2.2 CULTURAL RELATIVISM: RESCUING SOCIAL MEANINGS AND SUBJECTIVITIES

In opposition to universalism, radical cultural relativism holds that culture is the sole source of the validity of a moral right or rule (Donnelly, 1984). This perspective is often associated with anthropologists (Karisa, 2016), who have been on the forefront of criticising representational frameworks within human rights discourse for stripping events of their social meanings and subjectivities, which are seen as the heart of acts of injustice (Wilson, 1997; Archambault, 2011). On this view, determinations of right and wrong are subjective and therefore cannot be judged independently from their cultural context (Karisa, 2016). Based on notions of communal autonomy and self-determination, cultural relativism holds that cultural variations, at least some, are exempt from legitimate criticism by outsiders (Donnelly, 1984). From that perspective, universalists are considered paternalistic for assuming they know what is best for people in the global south (Karisa, 2016; Mohanty, 1991; Morsy, 1991). Relativist scholars argue that cultural relativism emerged to confront Western imposition of moral values on third world nations, particularly on women (Danial, 2013).

In other words, cultural relativism asserts that there is no absolute truth -- ethical, moral or cultural -- and that there is no meaningful way to judge different cultures because all judgments are ethnocentric (Gellner, 1985). In relation to the subject of and research on, early marriage such ethnocentrism would manifest itself in terms of treating women as victimised objects rather than subjects capable of making choices (Bunting, 2005; Archambault, 2011; Callaghan, 2015; Karisa, 2016).

The cultural relativist approach has been interpreted, by some scholars, as taking a static conception of culture, and criticised for emphasising the group at the expense of the individual (Zechenter, 1997). Moreover, the existence of 'such a thing as culture' has been questioned, scholars argue that the determination of which customs are representative of a given culture can vary among individuals (Zechenter, 1997). Critics suggest that cultural relativists are essentially excusing a range of human rights abuses, and question why groups' cultural rights should trump women's individual rights (Gordon, 1991; Okin, 1997). In other words, critics of relativist approaches question why cultural rights in relation to traditional "harmful practices" -- the label often given to early marriage -- should prevail over (young) women's basic individual rights.

## 2.2.3. A CONTINUUM RATHER THAN BINARY SET OF POSITIONS:

'Radical universalism' and 'radical cultural relativism' are only the two extremes of a continuum rather than a binary set of positions. Between these two extremes, there are various argumentations that acknowledge than universal principles and the value of cultural difference

can come together (Donnelly, 1984; Appiah, 2006). These positions have been roughly categorised into 'weak or descriptive relativism' and 'strong or normative relativism' (Donnelly, 1984; Zechenter, 1997).

Weak relativists acknowledge that culture can be an important source of the validity of a moral rights or rule. Strong relativists hold that culture is the principal source of the validity of a moral right or rule. In other words, from a weak relativist perspective, there is a weak presumption of universality and relativity serves to address potential excesses of universalism. In strong relativism, the assumption is that rights are always culturally determined and universality serves as a check on the potential excesses of relativism (Donnelly, 1984). Moreover, across all the positions in strong and weak relativism, relativity can be seen at different levels: in the substance of human rights frameworks, in the interpretation of individual rights, or in the form in which rights are implemented (Donnelly, 1984).

These various positions also appear in relation to (early) marriage (Howard, 1982; Bunting, 2005; Karisa, 2016). Weak cultural relativists argue that international legal frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights allow for interpretation of concepts such as marriage, and acceptance of traditions such as bride price by linking it to other rights such as women's protection (Donnelly, 1984). By making a distinction between human rights and human dignity, Howard (1982), advocates for legislation that allows individuals to both remain within their culture and fulfil cultural norms as well as to opt out from some traditional customs –such as early marriage. Some stronger relativists focus on the implementation of universal norms, proposing the condemnation of the practice of 'child marriage' but by allowing different cultural understandings of the concept of 'child' (Freeman, 2002). Others call for constructive dialogue between universalism and (cultural) relativism for various reasons: to link global regulations with culturally diverse causes and consequences of early marriage, to accommodate the complexity of notions such as childhood, and to contextualize any approach addressing early marriage (Bunting, 2005).

#### 2.2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Interventions and activism addressing early marriage are predominantly focused on convincing groups to abandon the practice, advocating for the defence and protection of human rights (Karisa, 2016). However, at the same time, there is increased consensus as to the need to better understand local meanings underpinning early marriage (Karisa, 2016), acknowledging the influence of culture. With this study I hope to contribute to developing better understanding of local views around early marriage (marriage-family and sexuality) in the context of Kolda, Senegal. I do not aim to value the practice as right or wrong, neither defend or confront the morality of human rights. However, I depart from a more relativist approach acknowledging that local contexts influence the practice and/or its meaning. Debates of what is 'culture', and whether or to what extent contextualization fits in the international human rights framework fall outside of the scope of this study. However, the study is expected to generate new insights

on the suitability of universal rights notions in local contexts (in the case of early marriage) and thereby allow me to contribute to the universalism and relativism debate.

## 2.3. GENDER

“Child marriage is rooted in unequal gender status and power relations that can result in the perpetual subjugation of girls and women. In the absence of viable legal remedies, discriminatory cultural practices based on stereotypical views of women’s roles and sexuality are among the structural causes of child and forced marriage” (Flavia Pansieri, Deputy UN high Commissioner for Human Rights, Panel Discussion at Human Rights Council Session, Geneva, June 2014)

Gender is central to the study of early marriage. First, studying early marriage necessitates engagement with concepts that have been long addressed within gender and feminist scholarship and practice, that is, marriage, family and sexuality. Second, the practice of early marriage is broadly recognized to be underpinned by gender inequalities. The following section engages with gender theory, detailing the approach I adopt in this study. I start by arguing that postcolonial feminism is relevant in that it facilitates reflection on questions of location. Then, I discuss gender relational theory, with a focus on the analytical framework offered by Connell’s four dimensions model.

### 2.4.1 POST-COLONIAL FEMINISM: QUESTIONS OF LOCATION

Postcolonial feminism adds a new dimension for consideration to the ideas presented in previous section as to the importance of contextualization, that is, the question of the location of the production of knowledge: who speaks and for who. This strand of feminist scholarship builds on post-colonial thought, an academic discipline that emerged in late 1980s and expanded in the 1990s responding to the legacy of colonialism (Theim, 2003). As a critical theory, post-colonialism examines and responds to colonial leftovers within economic, social, cultural, and linguistics spheres. The focus is to counter euro-centrism, defending emancipation and social justice, and opposing oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation (Nayar, 2008). Moreover, postcolonial authors argue that during colonial history the self-definition of ‘Western Cultures’ was based upon its ‘difference’ from its others (Narayan, 1997).

In this post-colonial context, feminists from once-colonized countries started advocating for self-representation on their own terms (Spivak, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Suleri, 1992; Narayan, 1997). These authors argue that mainstream feminism, both liberal and radical approaches, constitutes an ethnocentric white and middle-class discourse, predominantly covered by West European and North American experiences (Chowdury, 2009). According to postcolonial feminists, the West has been the primary referent in theory and practice, with no attention to the particular experiences of women residing in postcolonial nations (Spivak, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Mishra, 2013). From a postcolonial perspective, mainstream feminism is understood as Western Feminism.

Western feminism is criticised for universalizing women as a group, and more particularly for creating the category of ‘third world women’ as a single monolithic subject (Mohanty, 1991).



The use of women as a homogeneous category obscures differences related to race, class, ethnic and other circumstances (Ghandi, 2005). Moreover, the representation of 'third world woman' is based on the assumption of a shared oppression, constructing a singular image build on characteristics such as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised (Mohanty, 1991). Postcolonial authors argue that 'western' culture has been self-defined differentiating from 'the other', the non-western (Narayan, 1997). In a similar vein, postcolonial feminists argue that mainstream feminists have defined 'third world women' in contrast to an implicit self- representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty, 1991). In other words, power is exercised in Western feminism by homogenising and systematising the oppression of women in the third world in contrast to western women. Postcolonial feminists highlight that subordination is not uniform: not within the same period across groups, not within the same group (Krishnaraj, 2000).

"Third world women as a group or category are automatically and necessary defined as religious (read " not progressive"), family-oriented (read " traditional"), legal minors (read " they are still not conscious of their rights"), illiterate (read "ignorant), domestic (read "backward"). This ishow the "third world difference is produced". (Mohanty,1991, p.72).

Therefore, postcolonial feminist brings attention to the importance of the location of the production of knowledge. Who speaks for who and whose voices are being heard appears as central in postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, 1991; Young, 2003; Krishnaraj, 2000). Some authors argue that when Western women speak for others, they only displace them, replacing their voices with their own (Boehmer, 2006; Chowdury 2009). Postcolonial feminists aim to address the silence about the experiences of women in countries from the 'third world' so that familial, social, economic and legal structures are not treated as phenomena to be judged by Western standards (Mishra, 2013).

In relation to early marriage, some scholars have highlighted that voices of young women are largely absent in literature, which further entrenches the construct of the young bride as an oppressed victim (Callaghan et al., 2015). While this study aims to contribute to filling the gap of the absence of young women's voices in early marriage literature, postcolonial insights show that this is not enough. To draw on the reflections by postcolonial feminists is necessary for this study to avoid any paternalistic approach, identify pre-assumptions acknowledging and reflecting on my condition as a Western student, and capture, as much as possible, interpretations from the perspectives of young women and men. At the same time, I acknowledge the limitations of reflective efforts because, as Mohanty states: 'there is no apolitical scholarship' (p. 53)

#### 2.4.2 INTERSECTIONALITY: A TOOL TO AVOID SINGLE AXIS ANALYSIS

With the criticism that Western feminism claimed to speak universally for all women, feminist researchers increasingly became aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytical

category. As a response, intersectionality became a tool embraced by many feminist researchers and activists. Since its emergence, intersectionality has been seen as one of the most important contributions of women and gender studies (McCall, 2005).

Originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality was intended to address the tendency of treating race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) argues that both in antidiscrimination law and feminist thought, analysis of subordination along a single categorical axis was erasing Black women in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination. Gender and race interact shaping the multiple dimensions of Black women's experiences (Davis, 2008). Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Crenshaw argued that the focus on the intersections of race and gender highlight the need to take into account multiple grounds of identity when analysing the social construction of the world (Crenshaw, 1991).

Moreover, intersectional scholars defended that Intersectionality could be more broadly used as a way of mediating the tension between assertions of multiple identities and the ongoing necessity of group politics (Crenshaw, 1991; Brah & Phoenix, 2004). Now, 'Intersectionality' refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power. The prime objective of postcolonial feminists is to make differences (race, class, and setting) regarding women's lives visible and recognisable in the eyes of Western feminists in non-oppressive ways. To that end, postcolonial feminism explores the intersections of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation, class, race and sexualities in the different context of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality and rights (Schwarz & Ray, 2005).

However, some scholars argue that intersectionality is not enough to study gender relations, because it still employs categorical thinking (Connell, 2011). In this study, while acknowledging the relevance of intersectional feminism, I aim to move away from categorical analysis and instead adopt a more relational approach to gender.

#### 2.4.3 A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO GENDER

Intersectionality has been seen as a sophisticated form of categorical thinking (Connell, 2011). Categorical thinking was usually based on dichotomous classifications based on sex (biological essentialism) or social norms (sex role model of gender). Intersectionality added complexity, making gender categories more locally relevant (e.g. rural young black women). However, it is predominantly based on a combination of multiple dimensions, all from a categorical approach (Connell, 2011).

Connell (2011) identifies two main weaknesses of categorical approaches. First, it underplays diversity within gender categories. Consequently, women (or 'rural young black women') are targeted as a group distinct from and separated from men (or 'rural young black men'). 'Men' as

a category, often appear as the norm or the privileged and are not seen in active relations with women. Hence, in academia and in practice, it happens that gender is named but it is actually women who are spoken about or targeted (Connell, 2005). Second, categorical approaches cannot capture the dynamics of gender as it does not see gender as a historical process. Categorical approaches ignore that gender orders are constantly created and challenged.

Relational approaches to gender address these weaknesses. In relational theory, gender is a relation (Hagemann-White, 2001). Gender is understood as a social structure constituted and shaped by patterned relations between and among women and men (Schofield et al., 2002). Gender is also seen as multidimensional, embracing various types of relations simultaneously – economic, power, affective, symbolic -- and operating at the same time at different levels –intra and interpersonal, institutional and societal (Lorber, 1994). Gender structures are cultural points of references, but the practice of gender also implies a process of what Connell (2001) calls social embodiment: a bidirectional relation between bodies and cultural ideals. Finally, a relational approach also incorporates the dimension of time, seeing gender as a changing process, ‘the ontoformativity not just the performativity of gender’ (Connell, 2011, p.1677).

The relational aspect in marriage is self-evident, as it is the union of two people (in Senegal always a (young) woman and a (young) man). Marriage is about the relations between both. Men and boys are also actors in gender structures and change. A literature review on early marriage found that there is little work done with men and boys in the context of early marriage (Greene, 2014). More specifically, it has been highlighted that there is a need to examine early marriage within a gendered context that focuses on the relational aspect of the process of family formation (UNICEF & ICRW, 2015). This study adopts a relational approach to gender by using Connell’s definition of gender and the four dimensions model of gender relations.

#### 2.4.4 FOUR DIMENSIONS TO ANALYSE GENDER RELATIONS

The most common usage of gender refers to social and cultural differences between women from men, based on the biological division between male and female. This usage puts emphasis on dichotomy and difference. To move the focus from difference to a focus on relations, I adopt the definition proposed by Connell (2002), who states that gender is:

‘[T]he structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices (governed by this structure) that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes’ (p, 10).

This definition implies that gender patterns can differ across cultures as gender arrangements are reproduced socially, constrained by power structures, and are constantly changing (Connell, 2002). To explore gender, this study uses Connell’s (2002) four-dimensions model of gender relations.

Connell (2002) described gender relations as all the relationships happening in and around the reproductive arena. Hence, gender relations are not only direct interactions between men and women but also among men and/or among women. Gender relations can also be indirect, for example, mediated by technology. Gender relations are constantly constituted in daily life,

however, the practice of gender is not entirely free and it is constrained by structures, defined as enduring patterns of social relations. Although a structure does not automatically determine how people or groups act, a structure of relations defines possibilities and consequences. On that view, Connell (2002), in her four-dimensions model, defines four structures in the modern system of gender relations: power relations, production relations, emotional relations and symbolic relations, which are in constant interaction. The separation of the four dimensions is carried out in order to facilitate analytical purposes.

The power dimension of gender refers to both institutional power (patriarchy) as well as diffuse and discursive power as defined by Foucault. Connell argues that both types of power can co-exist and that analysing the power dimension in gender relations requires attention to the ways both types are contested and even transformed. Production relations are the ways production and consumption are arranged along gender lines. This dimension refers to the sexual division of labour but not only, that is, also the broader gender accumulation process which goes beyond the economy is its 'narrow' sense. Emotional relations entail the attachment and antagonism among people and groups organised along gender lines. Emotional commitments can be positive or negative or both at the same time. These relations can be found in the family, at the workplace, or at any other sphere as it goes beyond the face-to-face. Sexuality is a major arena of emotional attachment. Last, the symbolic dimension of gender relations pays attention to the interpretation of the social world, the gender meanings found in language, culture, clothes and traditions. Symbolic gender relations are based on the gender meanings attributed to the social word. Gender symbolism operates in language, dress, makeup, gesture, video, photography and in other impersonal forms of culture. These four dimensions are used in the present study to explore gender relations, particularly within families and marriage, but also at the broader community level.

## **2.3 WHAT IS AGENCY?**

'It is because questions about agency are so central to contemporary political and theoretical debates that the concept arouses so much interest -- and why it is therefore so crucial to define' (Ahearn, 200, page 110).

In this subsection, I detail how the conceptualization of the notion of agency is framed in this study. First, I define agency from a socio-cultural approach using a skeletal definition that facilitates the identification of multiple forms of agency. I present a number of typologies of agency that I use as a reference in this study and which incorporate insights from different approaches and research traditions. Second, I draw on conceptual reflections around agency from within two fields that are key to research on early marriage, that is, feminism, and childhood and youth studies.

### **2.3.1 A SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO AGENCY**

There is an extensive body of literature on agency (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979). The concept has been increasingly used during the last decades by scholars and practitioners from different fields, leading to various definitions. The roots of agency as a concept are in the social sciences

(Archer, 2003; Giddens, 1984), but has also been used in other fields such as anthropology (Ahearn, 2001) and gender research (Clegg, 2006; McNay, 2004). In this study, I use the definition of agency proposed by Ahearn (2001), which emphasises that all action is sociocultural mediated, in its production as well as in its interpretation.

‘Let me propose, then, a provisional definition of the concept: Agency refers to the sociocultural mediated capacity to act’ (Ahearn, 2001, p.112)

While this definition takes a more socio-cultural approach by assuming that social and cultural contexts play an important role mediating human activities, it is, as the author states, only a bare bones skeletal definition that aims to facilitate the identification of diverse forms of agency (Ahearn, 2001). The definition acts, thus, as a point of departure for a more thorough understanding of agency, as both complex and ambiguous. To that end, I draw on different types of agency as identified (in particular) in studies on young women’s agencies in the global south. These various forms of agency are not necessarily or exclusively defined from a socio-cultural approach, but incorporate and build on other research traditions and approaches to agency such as structuration theories, post-structuralism contributions, and life course notions of agency.

Structuration theory facilitates the understanding of how structural factors such as class, race, gender, economic and occupational conditions constrain and enable individual agency (Giddens, 1984; Archer, 2003). Moreover, structuration theory incorporates the influence of power in agency, by describing agency not only as intentions but also as capacities to act (Giddens, 1984). The limitation of this approach is that it only refers to individual and rational actions. Poststructuralist theory provided new understandings of agency as a discursive and social phenomenon. The differences with and within this strand relate to how possibilities for individual agencies are seen, that is, as more restrictive (Foucault, 1998; Butler, 1992; Davies, 1997) or less restrictive (McNay, 2004). One of the main contributions of poststructuralism has been the disclosure of invisible power structures embedded in subjectivities or positions of subjects, as well as the recognition of the influence of hegemonic discourses. Finally, life course notions of agency have provided insights in terms of the need to understand agency within the continuum of the individual life course. Intentions of agency might not be only focused on the present, but also focused on conducting or constructing life courses (Eccleston, 2007).

Taking into account that elements from different traditions provide useful insights in the study of agency, there are several typologies of agency that facilitate the study of agency in the context of early marriage in rural Kolda. First, is the distinction between thin and thick agency developed by Klocker (2007). This conceptualization is based on Giddens’ structuration theory as it avoids the dualism structure/agency, as well as on Foucault’s notion of power as it adopts a relational view of power considering that even the less empowered have an ability to act. Klocker’s typology allows for identification of forms of agency in highly restrictive contexts, preventing that some forms of agency are denied and considered as non-existent. In highly restrictive contexts agency could be thin, while in contexts with a rich and broad range of options agency could be thick. Rather than a dual classification of agency, Klocker’s typology

represents a continuum related to the capacities or possibilities for voluntary and willed actions, in which all people are actors. People's options of choice depend on contexts, structures and relationships and therefore they agency can vary over time, space, and across relationships. Identifying agencies as thin rather than non-existent enables the acknowledgement of both young women's difficult circumstances as well as their efforts to build better lives (Klocker, 2007).

Through his conceptualization, Klocker explains why Tanzanian child domestic workers affirmed having chosen by themselves entering domestic work. The agency of these young women was shaped by constraining factors such as poverty, employment options and educational opportunities. Hence, young women did not enter domestic work because of being ignorant or weak, but because they saw it as a coping strategy within the context they lived in (Klocker, 2007). Other studies on rural young women agency in intimate relationships and marriage build on the notion of thin agency to describe findings that suggest that young women actively make choices, negotiate, accommodate, resist and construct their own lives also within restrictive contexts, even if their actions might seem wrong or uninformed (Bell, 2007; Murphy-Graham & Leal, 2015).

This research also draws on the notion of judicious opportunism, which states that under conditions of uncertainty, agency or social action is not per se based on the fulfilment of prior intentions, but rather on being able to take advantage of the opportunities that can emerge (Johnson-Hanks, 2005). Using the notion of judicious opportunism, Johnson-Hanks (2005) argues that because of the uncertain context they live in, young Beti women in Cameroon do not have fixed plans or preferences in relation to marriage and reproduction, but rather take flexible strategies that allow them to keep alternatives open as long as possible, and adapt to the possibilities that emerge. This concept contributes to the general understanding of intentionality, uncertainty and action, broadening a view on agency not only as the fulfilment of a prior intention but which can also take the form of a more flexible strategy.

### 2.3.2 AGENCY IN FEMINIST STUDIES: AVOIDING DICHOTOMIES

Within gender and feminist studies, there has been an increasing engagement with the notion of agency (Adermahr, 1997, Davies, 1991, Gardiner, 1995, Goddard, 2000, McNay, 2000), but its use has been problematic, mainly because of two main conflicting tendencies that represent two equally important imperatives.

On the one hand, in trying to make visible the patriarchal system of dominance, feminist theories highlighted the constraining powers of gender structures and norms, downplaying resistance capacities, and denying women any agency (Fraser, 2012). On this view, feminist theories have often portrayed women as victims, accepting the inevitability of domination. This perspective has been criticised for homogenising women as a group, particularly 'third world women', erasing and ignoring modes and experiences of resistance (Mohanty, 1991; Chow, 1991). On the other hand, feminists tried to recover past and present, lost or obscured forms of resistance to inspire women's activism, many understanding that agency is about resisting the

patriarchal status quo (e.g., Goddard 2000). The emphasis on resistance as 'the' form of agency, led to suppositions that models of change are quasi-voluntary (Fraser, 2012). Therefore, some scholars have criticised the equation of agency as synonymous with resistance arguing that opposition is only one form of resistance (Ahearn, 2001), that there is no such thing as pure resistance (Ortner, 1995), and that resistance has been romanticised (Abu-Lughod, 1990). These two approaches, denying women's agency and equating agency with resistance, centered the debate on the dichotomy of victim/actor or passive/powerful, making women either passive victims without agency or active agents confronting dominance through resistance.

This study aims to adopt a third perspective that moves away from this dichotomy. Thinking beyond this dichotomy requires adopting a more integrated and nuanced conception of agency that can encompass both the power of social constraints as well as the power to act against them in a situated manner (Fraser, 1992). This means not only that different types of agency exist, but also that these variations can appear simultaneously because the motivations behind human actions are multiple, complex and contradictory (MacLeod, 1992; Ahearn, 2001; Klocker, 2007; Murphy-Graham & Leal, 2015), Women are both active subjects and subjects of domination. Also as subordinate players, women take an active part in social life, indicating that their agency is complex and ambiguous as they can accept, accommodate, ignore, resist or protest -- even all at the same time (MacLeod, 1992).

This complexity is well captured in the notion of 'accommodation protest'. Accommodation protest refers to one style of agency, identified particularly among women, resulting from the influence of contradictory subjectivities embedded in power relations, acknowledging women's simultaneous attempts to alter and to maintain, to protest and to accommodate (MacLeod, 1992). Three reasons have been given to explain this form of agency among women. First, for women, there is not only one single power constraint but rather different and overlapping ones, including gender, class and race. Second, women's power relations are interlinked with other kind of ties such family bonds or romantic love. Hence, the goal is not to eliminate 'the other', but rather create new relationships of equality, which entails that inversion or opposition can be less attractive. Third, women live among, with and, in some ways/in certain cases, as part of the dominant group (MacLeod, 1992). The notion of a form of agency such as accommodation protests not only forces our thinking on agency beyond the dichotomies mentioned but also incorporates the influence of subjectivities embedded in power relations. In other words, how some forms of agency can confront hegemonic discourses creating what Gramsci (1971) names counter-hegemonies, or in other words, alternative visions of social relations.

### 2.3.3 AGENCY IN CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH STUDIES: LOOKING BEYOND 'THE RIGHT KIND' OF AGENCY

Similar to feminist scholars drawing attention to hegemonic discourses of women's agencies, scholars working in the field of childhood and youth agency studies problematize hegemonic notions of childhood and related moralities.

Since the early 1990's, the notion of agency has been of central importance within the field of childhood and youth studies (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Child protection programs and interventions were criticised for taking paternalistic approaches that relied on the notion of children's best interest, excluding them from participation and decision-making. Similar to the ways in which feminist efforts to highlight patriarchal domination obscured women's agency, child protection efforts based on the idea of children's best interest were seen to ignore children's capacity for action, portraying children as passive victims and resulting in a sense of powerlessness (Panter-Brick, 2002; James-Wilson, 2007; Van Dijk & van Driel, 2009). As a consequence of these strong criticisms, both scholars and practitioners started thinking about children and youth as social agents (e.g. Honwana, 2005; Notermans et al. 2011). Nowadays, principles of children and youth agency and rights to participation are widely accepted and assumed. Studies and interventions acknowledge children's capacity for autonomy and self-reflection.

However, some scholars have highlighted that this acknowledgement of children and young people's agency is dependent on some kinds of agency (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Durham, 2008). The attribution of agency to social subjects, particularly children and youth, has become paradigmatic, hegemonic and often unquestionable (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Children and youth are seen as agents only when it is 'the right kind' of agency (Durham, 2008). The right kind of agency refers to two main elements. One, the consistence with the liberal conception of autonomous agency, and two, that it fits the global moral image of childhood (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Bordonaro & Payne (2012) use the term 'Ambiguous agency', to visualise agency that confronts or challenges the two elements defining the 'right kind of agency'. The ambiguous agency is often denied and even corrected. In practice, children and youth linked to morally ambiguous activities, for such as sex work or child brides, are only seen as in need, at risk and victims. In these cases, evidence of agency in the form of self-consciousness, self-reflection or capacity to manage their lives represent strong practical moral problems (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Considerations about theoretical and practical implications of ambiguous agencies confronting moral politics of childhood and youth have been largely absent both in programmatic and academic literature.

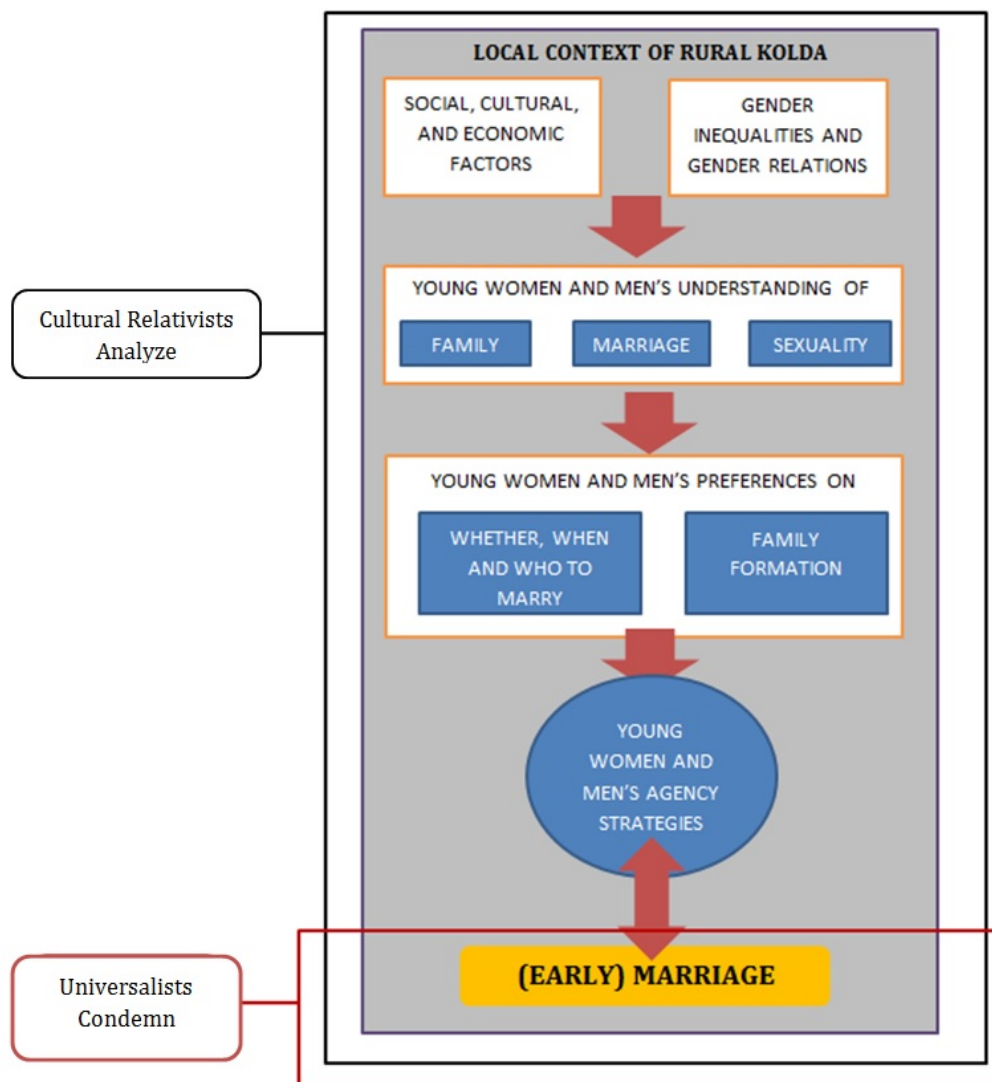
In sum, with the conceptualization of agency described, I aim to acknowledge its complexity and ambiguity, taking into account that its production and interpretation is sociocultural mediated. Therefore, different types of agency can exist and even appear simultaneously, influenced by diverse and sometimes contrary subjectivities embedded in power relations. Additionally, I draw on the conception that hegemonic discourses of social relations can influence if and how agency is identified. This study seeks to move away from the dichotomies of victim/actor-passive/powerful, without ignoring evidence of agency that does not suit global understandings of childhood and reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications of all forms of agency identified.



## 2.4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Figure 2 visualises the concept model that guided the study. The direction of the conceptual model highlights that the aim of the study is to explore young women and men's understandings and preferences around marriage, family (formation) and sexuality to analyse from that lens which (if any) are young women and men's agency strategies around marriage decisions. That is, departing from a more cultural relativist approach that seeks contextualization to understand the practice of early marriage. The model shows that the first concepts to explore are family, marriage and sexuality. The exploration of these concepts is done from a more grounded theory approach, to avoid detailed pre-conceptions of these terms that facilitate openness to young women and men's perceptions (Strauss, 1994). While during the analysis of the findings around young women and men's conceptualizations of these concepts theory was used, the theoretical framework that guided the study did not depart from any specific conceptualization of these concepts.

Figure 2: Conceptual Model



## **2.5. CONCLUSION**

In this section I have described the theoretical concepts and frameworks I use in this study and the reasons of my positioning. First, I use the term 'early marriage' for its greater flexibility, inclusiveness and neutrality. Second, as early marriage is predominantly framed as a human rights violation, I engage with the broader debate on universalism and relativism. I depart from a more relativist position as I explore understandings behind early marriage in the specific case of Kolda-Senegal, pre-assuming that local contexts have an influence. Third, to explore gender relations I adopt a relational approach to gender to avoid categorical thinking. I also draw on insights from postcolonial feminism to force reflection on questions of location. Finally, I adopt a socio-cultural definition of agency. It is a skeletal definition that allows using agency types built on various approaches, with the aim to capture the complexity and ambiguity of agency.

# 3

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

‘Tanala? Yam Tan’<sup>2</sup>

Local salutation in rural Kolda



Picture 2: Taken during fieldwork while moving from one community to another

The core of the field work was conducted over a period of three months in 10 rural communities in Kolda, Senegal. The complete research design and details of all the methods used for data collection and analysis are explained in this chapter. First, I reflect on my ontological and epistemological position. Then, I detail the research questions that guided the study. The third sub-section describes the research design, and the fourth deepens into the analysis phase. In subsections five, six, and seven, I explain the quality criteria to assess the study, the ethical principles present in the entire process, and the most relevant research limitations.

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<sup>2</sup> How are you? In peace

### 3.1 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION

In this study, the belief that views on early marriage can vary across cultures, places and time is rooted in a constructivist ontological position. In constructivism not only social phenomena are seen as socially constructed but also the nature of the knowledge of the social (and 'natural') world (Bryman, 2008). Interpretations depend on people's mind sets. It is because of this assumption that the study aims to explore meanings of marriage, family and sexuality in the specific case of Kolda (Senegal). Hence, the research paradigm is based on a constructivist ontology.

However, as Sayer (2007, p.115) argues, distinguishing 'realistic' from 'unrealistic' is not that simple. Sayer (2007, p. 106) even argues that all researchers are realist at least some of the time although some may be reluctant to acknowledge it. Realism and constructivism are not two completely opposing positions, but rather two extremes of a more continuous set of positions. In some points of the research process (critical) realism was seen as a suitable ontology, particularly when exploring agency and constraining 'structures'<sup>3</sup>. So constructivism is adopted as the ontological position with flexibility of move along the continuum of positions. This allows understanding variables or phenomena's under analysis from different angles (e.g. age more socially constructed and maternal mortality more realist), as well as using various types of data (mainly qualitative, but also some quantitative).

The focus of the study is on understanding rather than explaining the practice of early marriage in rural Kolda. The main 'tool' to get this understanding is by grasping subjective meanings of related social phenomena's -family, sexuality and marriage. Differences in understandings are accepted and therefore the study explores subjective meanings expressed by different peoples. Various approaches to early marriage are taken into account. Hence, the epistemological position is interpretivist. More specifically, the study adopts a phenomenological approach in the sense that besides exploring how the populations in rural Kolda interpret early marriage, during the entire research process there is a constant personal reflection aimed at identifying and deconstructing my own pre-conceptions (Bryman, 2008).

### 3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions of the research were not fixed from the start. Along the research process, both during data collections as well as during data analysis, questions have been adapted, particularly the sub-questions. This is in line with the open nature of the research and the design with interactive phases.

The study aims to respond to one main questions and four sub-questions. Here, the final versions are presented.

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<sup>3</sup>Critical realism is not a dominant ontology within gender and feminist studies; however, it is starting to gain more attention within this field. For example, in thinking about relations between structures and agencies. (Gunnarson et al., 2016)

#### MAIN QUESTION

**What are the views of young women and men in rural Kolda, Senegal on marriage, family (formation) and sexuality, and how do they exercise agency in relation to decisions about whether, when and who to marry?**

#### SUBQUESTIONS

- How do young women and men in rural Kolda understand marriage, family and sexuality?
- What are the preferences around marriage and family formation of young women and men in rural Kolda?
- How do young women and men in rural Kolda exercise agency in relation to decisions about whether, when and who to marry?
- Explore gender from a relational approach

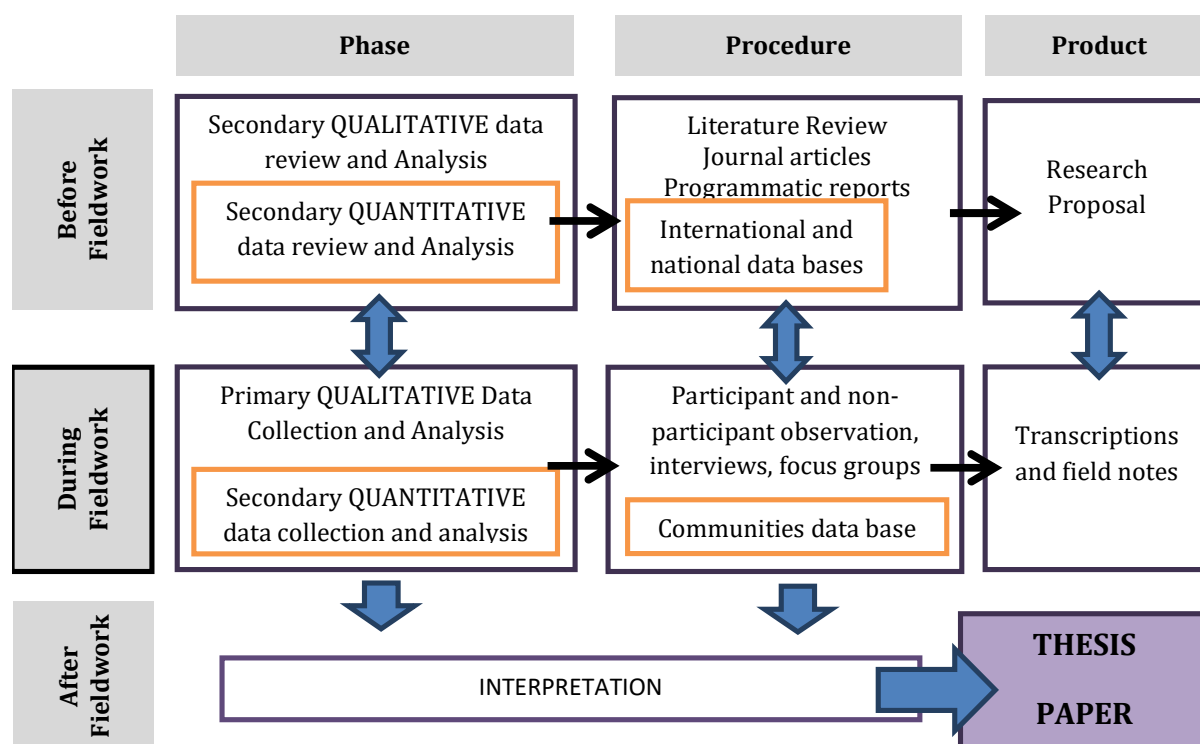
### 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is based on a mixed methods embedded design whereby the qualitative component forms the primary strand of the study, and the quantitative component provides a supplementary strand to allow for triangulation and generates a more complete account (Golafshani, 2003). The design has one phase in which the two strands interact in both data collection and analysis.

The qualitative strand consists of exploring understandings and preferences around marriage, family (formation) and sexuality in Kolda. This strand is based on three months of fieldwork in the Southern region of Kolda, with frequent stays in the 10 communities included in the research. The quantitative strand of the study has two main aims. First, to describe the early marriage situation from another angle; the perspective of the local organisation intervening in the communities. Second, the quantitative data allowed for further examination of particular findings that emerged from the qualitative analysis. This strand is based on a database developed by the local organisation through household surveys.

The different phases of the research process interacted. The interaction was particularly evident in two main points. One, during the first weeks of fieldwork. Based on the initial participant and non-participant observations, the research proposal was adapted: the focus of the questions, the main target group and the theoretical framework. Second, after fieldwork, during the analysis process, new literature was reviewed for better interpretations. Figure 3 provides a general overview of the entire research process.

Figure 3: Overview of the Research Process



Own elaboration based on Creswell et al. (2010)

### 3.3.1 METHODS

The research uses a combination of methods, mainly qualitative: participant and non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The data were gathered during a three-month stay in Kolda, during which I was embedded in a local organisation that implements a project on early marriage; ENDA Jeunesse Action (ENDA JA)<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the design uses a database containing data derived from household surveys that had been conducted by the local organisation before my arrival at the research location. The following sections discuss the various methods used:

- Non-Participant Observation
- Participant Observation
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Data Base/Household Surveys

#### Non-Participant Observation

<sup>4</sup> More info about the organisation on their website: <http://endatiersmonde.org/eja/bur-nat/index.html>

Extensive field notes were taken during the entire stay in Senegal, in a form of field diary, particularly during the time spent in the Southern region of Kolda. Marriage was a topic that easily ‘popped’ up in conversations: often one of the first questions posed when meeting a new person was ‘Madame ou mademoiselle?’. Therefore, every night, during daily life at the research location, I wrote down observations regarding conversations with and comments on marriage and family made by Moto-taxi drivers, computer technicians, or neighbours. Non-participant observation includes descriptions of the more general local context for a richer understanding of local realities as well as my own perceptions and thoughts.

Moreover, during fieldwork, I engaged with the online platform ‘Parole aux Jeunes’, which organises events on sexual and reproductive health and rights across Senegal. I specifically attended activities in the region of Kolda focused on informing people about a free telephone line with information about sexual and reproductive health ‘Ligne Gindima’.

Picture 3: Non-Participant observation



Taken during an activity of Parole aux Jeunes at the Football Stadium in Kolda

### Participant Observation

While I did not have any function within ENDA JA, the research was conducted under the organisation structure. I was based in ENDA JA’s office and in daily contact with the team executing the project (one coordinator and two field ‘animatrices<sup>5</sup>’). I could attend all the activities that were part of the project, where I would often support the team with logistical work (assistance list, distribution of materials, pictures for their outreach communications). Although I was presented as a student researcher, I was seen as part of the organisation, and therefore observation in all the activities is considered ‘participatory.’

The activities attended were selected based on two criteria: a) the topic, so the more explicitly related to marriage, family and sexuality the better, b) the location, to ensure that I would attend at least one activity in each of the 10 communities. In total, I attended 24 activities,

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<sup>5</sup> French word, a similar function as an ‘organizer’ or field worker.



including one organisation workshop, one girls' camp, four debates, 13 'chats'<sup>6</sup>, three community dialogues, and two special day events (Table 2).

Table 1: List of all Participant Observation Activities

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	TARGET GROUP	THEME COVERED	LOCATION	DATE
WORKSHOP	Local organisation team	SRHR	Kolda	22-24/09/2016
YONG WOMEN'S CAMP	Young women	Marriage, sexuality	Kolda communities	25-28/09/2016
DEBATE	Traditional leaders	Child protection/marriage	All communities	10/10/2016
	Teachers	Child protection/marriage	Thietty Commune	16/11/2016
	Clubs of young women	Family Planning	All communities	09/11/2016
		'Good behaviour'		27/11/2016
'CHAT'	Young women and men	Consequences of early marriage and early pregnancies	Thietty	13/10/2016
			Sare Simali	12/10/2016
			Dioumana	12/10/2016
			Diassyna	12/10/2016
			Sinthiang Fodé	13/10/2016
		Early sexuality	Thietty	18/10/2016
			Sare Simali	19/10/2016
			Dioumana	20/10/2016
			Sare Bidgi	26/10/2016
	Married young women	Income generation activities and children's education	Medina Sadioumana	10/11/2016
			Dianabo	11/11/2016
	Parents	Birth Act	Sare Simali	14/11/2016
			Thietty	15/11/2016
COMMUNITY DIALOGUE	Entire community	Child Protection	Thietty	06/10/2016
		Early marriage solutions	Medina Sadioumana	17/11/2016
			Dianabo	18/11/2016
DAY EVENTS	Young women	Early marriage (child's rights day)	All communities	20/11/2016
	Entire communities	Reproductive Health day	Sare Bidgi commune	12/11/2016

<sup>6</sup>'Causeries' is the term used by the organisation. The term refers to an informal open talk, a trustful environment where participants feel comfortable to discuss.



During the first three days in Kolda town, I participated in an *Organizational Workshop* on SRHR organised by ENDA JA for the Kolda-team. Facilitated by staff from UNFPA-Dakar, the workshop included in-depth debates on delicate issues, particularly sexuality, and participative activities such as defining terms like reproductive rights. During the workshop, we received news about an early marriage case and collectively wrote and published an online news article<sup>7</sup>.

Right after the workshop, the Girls Camp started. The camp brought together, during four days, 50 married and unmarried young women from two regions: Kolda and Tambacounda. The camp was aimed at promoting leadership skills and discuss early marriage related topics such as family planning, contraception, female genital mutilation, health services or child protection strategies. The participation in this camp at the beginning of the fieldwork represented a full immersion with a first rapid deep contact with young women.

During fieldwork, several community debates and chats within the Her Choice project were attended. The difference between these two activities was that debates were with one specific population group from the different communities to collectively discuss one particular issue, while 'chats' were with youth from only one community, aimed at creating a trustful environment in which to talk about delicate topics such as sexuality. The number of participants in these activities varied, with around 15 in community 'chats' and 25 to 30 in debates.

In community dialogues and in special day events members from the entire community could participate, fathers, mothers, young women and men, traditional and religious leaders. Community dialogues had a central component of awareness raising for which an external speaker gave a talk. Based on the talk, attendants would start a discussion sharing their opinions, positions and ideas on how to move forward. The number of attendants was around 40 people.

Special day events included a broader variety of activities around one theme. Two were attended. One was the celebration of the children's rights day for which girls from all the 10 communities were invited. The second was a day of free access to reproductive and sexual health services for five rural communities. The event included house-to-house visits by members of the young women's clubs to inform about the free services at the health post and engage in conversations around causes and solutions around early marriage. I joined one group that visited five families from the community of Medina Sadioumana.

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<sup>7</sup>Article online available at [http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/kolda-victime-de-mariage-force-une-fille\\_n\\_193921.html](http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/kolda-victime-de-mariage-force-une-fille_n_193921.html)

Picture 4: Participant Observation within ENDA JA activities



Clockwise: Organization workshop, chat with young married women, debate with rural teachers, and young women's camp

### Semi-structured Interviews

60 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Most interviews were with married and unmarried young women and men from the 10 rural communities from the research location<sup>8</sup> (39 interviews). As the research took a relational approach, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with people with whom young women and men are in daily interaction (fathers, mothers, teachers, traditional and religious leaders) and with representatives from organisations and institutions working to address early marriage in the area (local administration, international organizations). Hereby, multiple perspectives could be captured (Table 4). However, only the interviews with young women and men and with traditional and religious leaders were recorded and transcribed. These interviews were conducted in French, in most cases with the support of a French-Pulaar translator<sup>9</sup>.

The rest the interviews were less structured, more open, always in French without translation support. These interviews were not recorded but notes were taken during and after the interviews. In all 60 interviews, consent was asked orally in the beginning after a short presentation and introduction of the aim of the research. The introduction also mentioned the participant's rights: anonymity, confidentiality, and the right to stop the interview at any point and to skip questions. (Interview guides in annexes).

<sup>8</sup> Research location detailed in next sub-section 'Sampling'.

<sup>9</sup> Reflections about language in the sub-section 'Research Limitations'

Table 2: List of semi-structured interviews

GROUP	NUMBER	RECORDED
Young married girls	12	Yes
Young married boys	5	
Young unmarried girls	15	
Young unmarried boys	7	
<i>Sub-Total</i>		39
Imams	2	Yes
Community traditional leaders	3	
Teachers	4	
Fathers	1	No
Mothers	2	
Representatives local administration	2	
Other youth	3	
UNFPA staff	3	
Donor staff	1	
<i>Sub-Total</i>		21
<i><u>Total</u></i>		<i><u>60</u></i>

Picture 5: Example of an interview setting



### Focus Groups Discussions

At the end of the data collection, two focus group discussions were organised at the secondary school in the community of Thietty. Each focus group was composed of 8 participants, 4 young men and 4 young women. Focus groups are a useful tool to explore interactions among participants. As the research emphasised the aim to adopt a relational gender approach, mixed groups were chosen to get insights into the gender relations and interactions within a small group. However, it was a homogeneous group as participants were selected based on a similar age (14-17), education level and living in neighbouring communities. Homogeneity facilitated creating a sphere where participants could be open to share personal opinions about topics seen as intimate, such as marriage.

The focus group was divided into three parts. After the introduction, the session started with a collective discussion based on the description of pictures. There were various pictures of women and men performing different tasks. Each participant could choose one, describe it and reflect on it. Then, the rest of the participants gave feedback. Second, young women and men discussed in two separate groups three guiding questions. Finally, each group presented to the other their discussions and exchanged opinions.

The focus group was facilitated in French by myself with the support of a translator. The translator supported the facilitation of the focus group both as a second moderator as well as with punctual clarifications in Pulaar. The focus group was audio-recorded, with previous consent from the participants. Notes were also taken during and right after the focus group. (Focus group guide in annexes).

Picture 6: Participants of one focus group with the school teacher



### Households Surveys/ Data Base

I had initially planned to conduct surveys. However, the local organisation in which I was embedded during fieldwork had recently conducted household surveys in all families from 10 rural communities. These 10 rural communities were selected as the study sites for the present research. Therefore, instead of conducting new surveys again, I used the database containing the results of the surveys carried out by ENDA JA.

The database identifies all young women and men under the age of 18 from 10 rural communities in Kolda. The information is grouped in 17 variables. 14 are nominal categorical- community, name, sex, birth certificate, handicap, marriage status, age of marriage, children, who chose the partner, agreement with the choice, school, occupation, level of studies, negative consequences of early marriage, female circumcision, and three are discrete numerical- age, age of marriage, age of genital mutilation. ENDA JA also facilitated the surveys guides, the raw data and direct contact with the teams that carried out the surveys to post questions. However, this data is secondary.

### 3.3.2 SAMPLING

The research uses non-probabilistic sampling, more specifically generic purposive sample. Participants are selected according to the needs and focus of the study. Various criteria guided the sampling; most were fixed a priori (gender, age), others were contingent (evolved or appeared over the course of the study), e.g. marriage status. Sampling included both the selection of the study sites as well as the participants.

### Sample of study sites

The study is based on a critical case sample as the region of Kolda is chosen for being the one with the highest early marriage rate in Senegal (UNICEF & ICWR, 2015). Access to the field was facilitated by ENDA JA, which is executing a project on early marriage in 10 rural communities. ENDA JA selected these 10 communities for two main reasons. First, for being far from Kolda town (more rural, more isolated). Second, for not being an intervention zone for any other organisation working on early marriage in Kolda.

As Map 1 shows, the 10 communities that conform the sample of the study site are located in two 'communes'<sup>10</sup>: the 'commune' of Thietty (red circle) and the 'commune' of Sare Bidji (blue circle). These 'communes' are part of the arrondissement of Sare Bidji (green line), within the 'department' of Kolda (grey line and white), in the region of Kolda (purple line). Kolda town is the main urban area in Kolda 'department'. Therefore, the communities within the 'commune' of Thietty are more rural as they are further from Kolda town. Table 5 lists all the communities.

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<sup>10</sup> Commune is translated into 'Town'. However, in Senegal communes can have two statuses, 'commune de ville' (which can be translated into town), and commune d'arrondissement which refers for to the biggest community within a group of communities. The latest is the one this study refers to when talking about the research location.



Map 1: Location of the communities that conform the research location in Kolda region

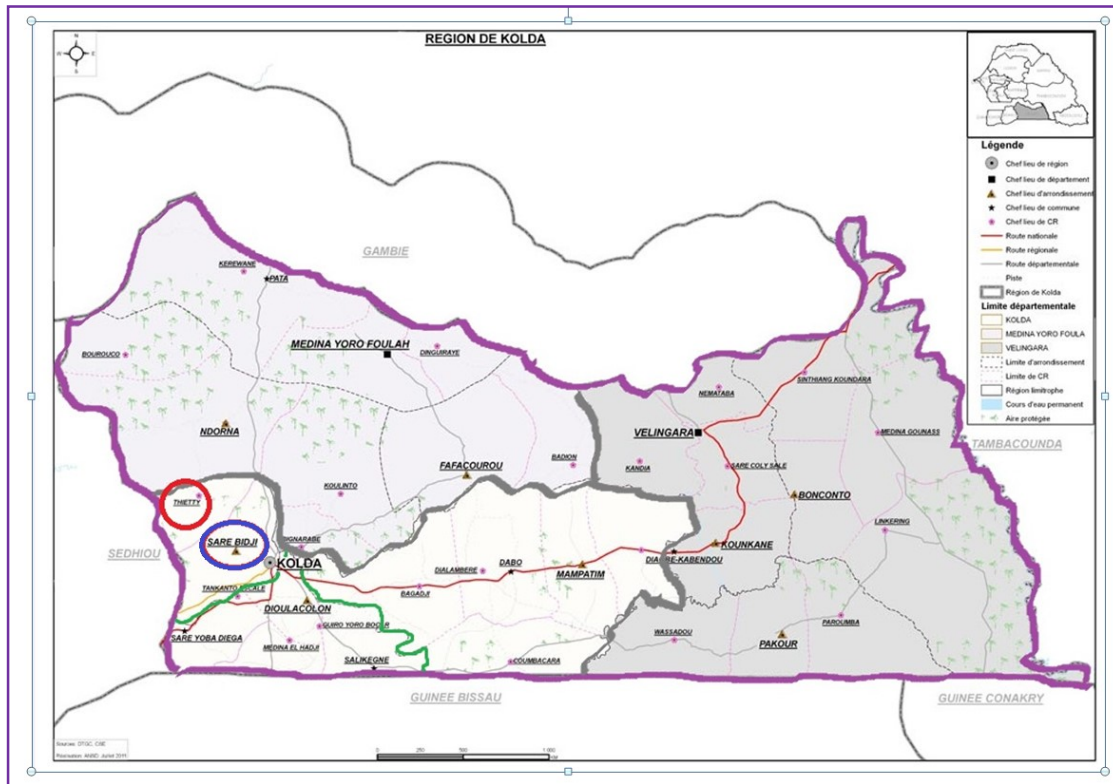


Table 3: Study sites: communities per commune

'COMMUNE'	COMMUNITIES				
<b>Sare Bidji</b>	Sare Bidji	Sare Dianfo	Medina Sadioumana	Sare Samba Thika	Dianabo
<b>Thietty</b>	Sinthiang Fodé	Sare Simali	Thietty	Dissasyna	Dioumana

### Sample of Participants

In view of the central research question, the main target group were young women and men from the 10 rural communities selected as study sites. These participants were largely selected on the basis of three criteria: gender, marriage status, and 'age'. Through this criteria, the sampling aimed for heterogeneity. That is, including both young women and men, married and unmarried, from diverse age ranges. However, while sampling was geared to creating an inclusive and diverse sample, there was not the intention to arrive at a perfectly balanced sample in line with these criteria. Given the nature of the research, the final sample included

more young women than young men, and more unmarried than married cases. These participants were selected at the end of ENDA JA community activities. 'Age' as sampling criteria was not numerical but rather categorical. In other words, the criteria 'age' was used to select 'young' participants with a flexible understanding of what constituted 'young,' that is, without applying a fixed age range.

Moreover, in accordance with the relational approach adopted, sampling included participants from population groups that can be considered closely involved in young women and men's lives: teachers, parents, relatives, traditional community leaders and religious leaders. These participants were selected in terms of accessibility, those with whom I had contact and that spoke French. Finally, the sample included representatives of organisations and institutions working on early marriage in Senegal and in Kolda.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative and quantitative data were analysed in the same phase. The software program Atlas.ti was used to analyse qualitative data, and Python and Pandas were used to analyse and visualise quantitative data.

#### **3.4.1 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

A content analysis of all qualitative data was done using open and descriptive coding. To that end, all recorded semi-structured interviews were transcribed in French (39 with young women and men, and 5 with community traditional and religious leaders). A large part of the interviews was transcribed during fieldwork during the course of primary data collection, others had to be transcribed later on after fieldwork was completed. Focus groups had been recorded but were not entirely transcribed. Instead, focus groups were again listened to, taking new notes and transcribing only some quotes. All this data was analysed using Atlas ti.

The rest of the qualitative data was in the form of two handwritten notebooks. This included notes from participant and non-participant observation, and from non-recorded interviews. This data was both in English and French and was not digitalized. The analysis was done manually.

For the content analysis, I first re-read all the qualitative data, highlighting relevant parts. Then, I started the coding. First an open coding, using descriptive codes. Then I made a list that included all codes, those in Atlas.ti and those in the manual coding. The list was cleaned, and I did a second round of coding using this list as the main guideline. In the third and last round of coding I grouped the codes in families, which resulted in 115 descriptive codes grouped into 19 families. This content analysis based on open descriptive coding mainly facilitated the identification and organisation of the results, as well as the quotes that would sustain the analysis.

After all the coding a first draft of the results was developed. Then, I went back and deeper into the theoretical framework which gave new insights to re-analyze the qualitative data. Therefore,

a second analysis was done on the written results. With the theoretical framework in mind, I re-read all the results and re-coded to re-structure the empirical part of this study, making stronger links with both the theory and the research questions.

### 3.4.2 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Descriptive quantitative analysis was used to describe the prevalence of early marriage in the 10 communities according to the variables used by the local organisation. The quantitative analysis was done on both numerical and categorical variables. In the case of numerical variables (age), the distribution (frequency distribution), central tendency (mean and mode) and dispersion (standard deviation) were analysed. For the categorical variables, quantitative analysis was done using contingency tables to display the frequency distribution in different combinations. Contingency tables allowed analysing the prevalence of early marriages, both in absolute and relative numbers, according to different variables such as sex, age, village or education level.

The visualisation of this analysis in bar graphs provided a fast and clear capture of the marriage prevalence in the research location. Contingency tables were used to particularly visualise the findings that emerged from the qualitative analysis. More specifically the interactions between i) choice of partner vs. agreement and ii) marriage status vs school attendance.

## 3.5 QUALITY CRITERIA

Traditional quality criteria (replicability, reliability and validity) are incompatible with the basic philosophical assumptions of this (largely) qualitative research project geared to examining local and contextualised understandings of abstract social phenomena and where there is not the intention to replicate, extrapolate or generalise. However, criteria in form of guidelines can facilitate reflection on what needs to be taken into account, particularly for students learning how to assess research (Hammersley, 2007).

Within the debate about the quality of qualitative studies, some authors have redefined the traditional criteria to apply it in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). Others have identified other sets of criteria (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Spencer, 2003). In this research, I use the quality criteria of trustworthiness, authenticity, and reflexivity.

### 3.5.1. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness is composed of four elements: credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The credibility of the research relies on the number of sources consulted. While this research explores the perspectives of young women and men, I did not only interview this target group but also various other actors that are closely related to and/or in regular contact with the community. As such, I aimed to take into account views and opinions of parents, grandparents, siblings, community leaders, religious leaders, and teachers.



In terms of transferability, the three-month stay in the research location allowed for very thick contextual description that should allow readers to develop judgment as to the possible transferability of findings. In the contextual chapter, I describe the main common identity elements of the people in this case study: location (rural), ethnicity (Pulaar) and religion (Muslim). These elements facilitate the identification of other similar groups; for example rural Pular communities and Muslim communities from the northern region of Senegal or West Guinee Bissau.

Although complete objectivity was not possible, the immersion in the research location and the start of data collection after two weeks of immersion were meant to avoid the influence of the first cultural shocks in the interviews and focus groups. Additionally, constant critical reflection was done with a view to militating against personal values and inclinations clouding data collection and analysis, thereby generating greater confirmability.

Finally, the auditing approach recommended for dependability was implemented. This was done by sharing reflections during the whole research process with both the academic supervisor and local supervisors and colleagues during fieldwork and keeping detailed records of all the phases of the research.

To improve trustworthiness I used triangulation. One of the reasons to develop an embedded design was to triangulate and complement the findings of the qualitative strand with a quantitative analysis of an extensive local database. This triangulation not only provides a thicker and more objective description of the situation of early marriage in the research location but also allows for a quantitative check of qualitative findings. For example, qualitative data collection found cases of married girls negotiating their continued attendance at school, and the database allowed for a quantitative check of this tendency.

### 3.5.2 AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of the research relies on its focus on listening to voices that are largely absent in early marriage literature (fairness). Authenticity is also the reason why quotes are left in the main text in French, to avoid excessive translations that change youth's words. The research locations include 10 rural communities, located in an area that is not easily accessible, and where the population had not participated in a similar research project before. Moreover, authenticity was also enhanced by my full immersion in research communities during three months, communities that are for the first time involved in an early marriage program, which has recently started.

### 3.5.3 REFLEXIVITY

During the writing of the proposal, critical self-reflection was used to identify and question my own beliefs and assumptions towards early marriage. Engaging in the debates about the human rights versus more relativist approaches was the first step to start trying to deconstruct pre-assumptions or distance myself from the influence of the dominant human rights discourse in my academic and professional experience. Again, the immersion in a local organisation was also

key to having a more direct sense of early marriage views from other perspectives, and consequently better uncover my own beliefs and assumptions that needed to be set aside. Moreover, keeping in mind my role and position as a researcher, facilitated the openness to new and different understandings of topics such as sexuality or female genital mutilation. In terms of methodological self-consciousness, participant observation was widely used precisely to avoid the more direct influences in the researcher-interviewee relationship. Without falling in a too reductionist explanation of the complex interrelations between the researcher and those who were involved in the research, two things were particularly notable. On one hand, people from the community did not appear to have very clear assumptions as to what my position on early marriage could be. In other words, they did not make a direct association between me and global discourses on ending early marriage. On the other hand, it was evident that I was seen as a complete outsider. Some participants, particularly during the first month, seemed surprised and/or confused with my presence, which influenced the openness, especially in interviews.

### **3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations in the research related to four main ethical principles: avoiding harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy, and dissemination. Despite being considered during the proposal writing phase, once in fieldwork new elements emerged that required additional reflections.

#### **3.6.1 HARM TO PARTICIPANTS**

The research topic can be seen as delicate, therefore a key measure to avoid harm to participants was the researcher's neutrality by being all the time conscious of the role as a non-judging listener. During community debates, I would not position myself towards any view to avoid offending any participant or give the community the impression that I believed some perspectives were better than others. In the case of interviews, at the beginning, it would be highlighted that there are no correct and incorrect answers and that the interviewee could stop the conversation at any time as well as avoiding questions if he/she wanted to. One problem with the 'no harm' principle is that it is not possible to identify whether harm is likely (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, particularly during interviews with young women and me I would be cautious with digging too much into sensitive topics (marriage experiences, sexuality). I would adapt the depth of the talk according to how comfortable and open I saw the interviewee.

Confidentiality is key to prevent harm, and a few unexpected challenges to it appeared during fieldwork and had to be addressed. First, the translator: it was necessary to insist that the translator could not be from the same region, and this created some difficulties as my network was quite close to the people from the communities. Even when having an 'outsider' translator, in two translators had connections with the interviewees' families and in those cases, I decided to conduct the interviews myself in French, despite that the interviewees preferred the local language. Second, the place to conduct the interviews: it was challenging to find spaces where the rest of the community could not hear the conversation because spaces are very open and people walk in and out. So in the cases where people walked in the place where an interview

was being conducted, I preferred to stop the conversation to guarantee confidentiality, than to continue with the interviews to not break the fluidity.

In terms of confidentiality to avoid harm, two dilemmas emerged. The first was related to the relation researcher and local organisation. At the end of an interview, a 14-year-old married young woman started asking to what extent what their parents did was correct. After giving a descriptive answer, explaining national regulations, different positions, and which organisations provide further information, I decided to inform the local organisation so that they would be aware of that case, breaking the confidentiality.

The second dilemma was the initial idea to also interview relatives of young women and men previously interviewed and which case was interesting to further explore. However, in practice, approaching relatives of interviewed girls and boys put confidentiality at risk and the potential harm was not clear. For example, parents disapproving that their sons or daughters were participating in the research. Moreover, avoiding this information was practically difficult and unethical. Therefore, in these cases, the research took a preventive approach and eliminated this second round of interviews with relatives.

Planned measures to ensure confidentiality were taken: anonymity in transcriptions, and writing field notes in another language. When presenting results in the thesis or article, it is done in a manner to avoid as much as possible any identification of the people involved in the research.

### 3.6.2 INFORMED CONSENT

From the first moment in the field, the local partner organisation presented me as a Research Master student to all the 10 communities. First directly to the community leader (chef de village), and then in the activities with the rest of the community people. Thus, while doing participant observation, the community was informed about my work. In the case of interviews and focus groups, it was emphasised at the beginning that all participation was voluntary and that stopping the interview or participation in the focus group was always possible. Moreover, to interviewees and focus group participants it was explained what was the main goal of the research, where I came from and what I would do with the results. Also, at the end, I provided the possibility to pose any questions or comments.

### 3.6.3 INVASION OF PRIVACY

The nature of the research made this ethical principle difficult. However, the principle of invasion of privacy was addressed in line with informed consent and the 'no harm' principle. Moreover, the semi-structured character of the interviews was important to be able to adjust the questions and the conversation in accordance with the interview openness and comfort with the topics.

### 3.6.4 DISSEMINATION

In the dissemination of the results two main criteria guide the ethical use of all the data. First, anonymity, not only by hiding participant's real names but also by not providing descriptive

information that can identify participants such as religious or traditional leaders. Second, transparency. This has to do with the honest use of the quotes, making a clear distinction between what are quotes and direct results and what are my own interpretations. Moreover, making explicit that quotes are translated is very important to not attribute directly translated words to participants.

During fieldwork at the end of each month, the main findings were shared with the representatives of ENDA JA through brief written reports. Moreover, a final presentation was planned to share the findings with the ENDA JA coordination team in Dakar at the end of my fieldwork. However, due to work trips of ENDA JA the presentation could not be organised. The abstract version will be translated into French and shared with the organisation as well as the article version in English. Moreover, during the writing process, preliminary findings were shared with representatives from the partner organisations from the Her Choice Alliance in an event organised by the University of Amsterdam. Other opportunities that might emerge to present the main findings will be considered, in line with the ethical criteria on the use of data mentioned.

### **3.7 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

In this study, three main research limitations need to be taken into account: the language barrier, my own position as a researcher, and the nature of the study (case study).

#### **3.7.1 LANGUAGE BARRIER**

Language was an important barrier during fieldwork. Senegal has multiple languages, French and Wolof constituting the two national languages. However, in Kolda, most people, particularly in rural communities would only speak Pulaar. Therefore, during the entire fieldwork, I was often dependent on a Pulaar- French translator. In community activities information was missed because the activity continues also during the translations. In interviews there were also language barriers: one, French is not my native language so there are always little meanings or words that are missed; second, some abstract words or concepts are difficult to translate to the local languages; and third, translators were young students so the translations were not entirely professional. In total, I worked with three translators, two young men and one young woman. There are several points to take into account related to the work with the translators: the translated version was always shorter, so often they would summarise. It was difficult to realise when the translator was probing or inferring responses without me realising. The body language of the translators could also influence the responses. Translations made the conversation less fluid and probably multiple probing opportunities were missed. Language also affected the interviewee- interviewer bond as the translator would be in the middle.

#### **3.7.2 RESEARCHER'S POSITION**

The research takes an interpretive approach, and besides the reflexivity process and efforts during the entire process, my own mindset might influence the outcomes. For example, my being a white female is likely to have shaped young women and men's responses to questions

regarding marriage, family formation and sexuality. Moreover, despite presenting myself always as student researcher from the University of Amsterdam, my relationship with ENDA JA workers would make people link me with ENDA JA, forming another factor that may have affected relationships.

### 3.7.3 CASE STUDY

This study is aimed at providing a better understanding of one particular context: rural Kolda. It has no aim of generalising to other groups or countries. The strong qualitative components make the findings tied to that case. It might give indications of factors to take into account when studying other cases, but the findings of this case are not meant to explain other cases.

## 3.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I detailed the methodological framework. I adopted a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. One main question and four sub-questions guided the study, which was focused on exploring how young women and men in Kolda understand marriage, family (formation) and sexuality and how they exercise agency in marriage decisions. I used a mixed methods embedded design in which the qualitative strand was dominant, and the quantitative was added for reasons of triangulation and completeness. Hence, most methods were qualitative: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and non-participant observation. Primary data were collected during three months of field work in 10 rural communities in Kolda, while embedded in the local organisation ENDA JA. Quantitative data was taken from a recently developed database by ENDA JA through household communities in the 10 rural communities that conform the study sites. It is a critical case study in which the sampling of the participants was purposive guided by three criteria that sedought diversity: gender, marriage status, and age range. The analysis was based on a content analysis of the qualitative data, and an additional quantitative analysis of the database, mainly through descriptive statistics and contingency tables. Trustworthiness, authenticity and reflexivity were the criteria used to guide the quality of the study. Ethical reflections related to four principles: do no harm, informed consent, invasion of privacy and dissemination. Finally, I described three main limitations of the research: language barriers, relations researcher-participants, and the nature of the research as a case study.

## 4

### CONTEXT: RURAL KOLDA

*'Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story'*(Chimamanda Addichie, 2009, TED Talk 'The dangers of a single story')



Picture 7: At a community, while and waiting for the participants of a community activity were I would do participant observation

This chapter provides a contextualization of the research location in two subsections. The first subsection provides a historic picture of the current region of Kolda building on three elements that appeared as central in the collective identity of the people living in the ten rural communities: ethnicity, language and religion. It also highlights the connections between the historical context and the current practice of early marriage. The second subsection presents the early marriage trends according to data sets developed by international, national and local organisations from a human rights/age perspective, zooming into Kolda and the ten rural communities where the research took place. Both subsections are based on a combination of literature review, secondary quantitative databases and primary qualitative data from interviews and fieldwork notes.

#### 4.1 'WE ARE PEUL AND MUSLIM'

All the research participants were *Peul*<sup>11</sup>, as most people living in the ten rural communities<sup>12</sup>. Research participants identified themselves as *Peul* but seemed to find it hard to describe the meaning or implications of this identity. Language and tradition were the most common answers, showing that ethnicity is a rather abstract and constructed concept. The use of ethnicity often deals with 'classification' (Banks, 1996), and therefore its use as an analytical term has been criticised by several scholars (Just, 1996; Ardener, 1989; Eriksen, 1993). To make its use more accurate and honest, Banks (1996) proposes to locate ethnicity in the observer's head, shifting the responsibility for ethnicity from the ethnographic subjects onto the analyst. Hence, for this subsection, ethnicity is an analytical term located in my own mind, used to facilitate the identification of contextual factors closer to the population living in rural Kolda.

The *Peul* are a culturally diverse group spread across the Sahel from the Atlantic coast to the Red Sea, particularly in West Africa (see map)<sup>13</sup>. With a population of 25 million people, it is the largest migratory population in the world (Levinson, 1996; Danver, 2015) as well as the largest nomadic pastoral community (Levinson, 1996; Gates 2010). However, the majority is semi-sedentary as well as sedentary settled farmers, artisans, merchants and nobility (De Corse, C., 2001). With roots in North Africa and the Middle East intermingled with West African ethnic groups, the *Peul* collective identity, is based on history, culture, religion and language. Thus, not linked to a particular ancestry but rather geographically based (Danver, 2015).

Map 2: Location of *Peul* groups



Source: Welch (2016)

<sup>11</sup>Peul is the French term, taken from Wolof *Përl*. It was the term used by research participants. Other names for the same group are Fula, Fulani, Fulbe.

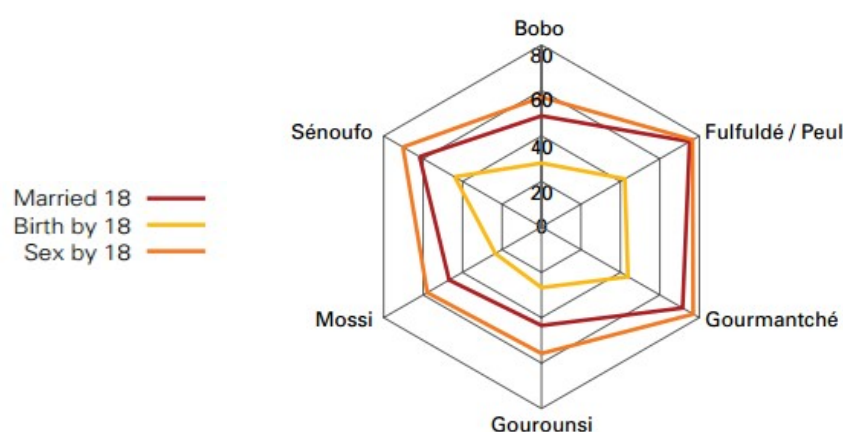
<sup>12</sup>There are a few Diola people living in the rural communities too. These people often have roots in the lower Casamance region, where the Diola are the prominent ethnic group.

<sup>13</sup>Countries with Peul population. From dark to light green according to how large the group in the country is.

The *Peul* are the second largest ethnic group in Senegal<sup>14</sup> and the largest in Kolda. There are no tensions between ethnic groups, but there are a set of stereotypes of each ethnic group. The *Peul* are seen by other ethnic groups in Senegal as the greatest exponents of traditional values (UNESCO, 1974). Therefore, practices considered harmful such as early marriage and female genital mutilation are often associated with traditions of the *Peul*. For example, the first online reaction to a news article that ENDA JA published about the death of a 13-year-old married young woman was: ‘<sup>15</sup>*Je suis sûre que c’est une femme al poular . Ils sont les seuls à donner leur fille en mariage à cet âge*’<sup>16</sup>

Although ethnicity is not highlighted as a root cause of the practice of early marriage, literature suggests that it can play a role in the prevalence of early marriage within countries. Data by UNICEF (2015) shows variation in the patterns of the timing of marriage across Senegal's main ethnic groups, with the highest rates among the *Peul* (Figure 4). The relations early marriage and ethnicity have been identified as a knowledge gap for further research (Greene, 2014).

Figure 4: Marriage, birth, sex timing by ethnicity



Source: UNICEF & ICRW (2015)

#### 4.1.1 PEUL EMPIRES AND KINGDOMS

The *Peul* was a powerful and influential group in the West African region, until being defeated by colonial powers in the early twentieth century. The Sokoto Caliphate, a Peul Empire, was the most powerful in Sub-Saharan Africa in the nineteenth century, with territories in what today is Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Ghana, Niger and Nigeria (Danver, 2015). Founded during the Jihad of the Fulani War in 1809 by Usman dan Fodio, a religious teacher and Islamic promoter, this Caliphate inspired other jihads in the region that

<sup>14</sup>The largest ethnic groups are: Wolof (43,7%), Perl (23,2%), Serers (14,8%), Diolas (5,5%), Mandinka (4,6%), Bambaras (1%), and Soninkés (1,1%). Here Peul includes also the Peul Toucouleur from the Northern Senegal. In Senegal, there are around 20 different ethnic groups.(Cisse, M, 2005).

<sup>15</sup>Article published during the workshop on SRHR with the team of the local organisation during fieldwork (see methodological chapter). Article online available at [http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/kolda-victime-de-mariage-force-une-fille\\_n\\_193921.html](http://www.seneweb.com/news/Societe/kolda-victime-de-mariage-force-une-fille_n_193921.html)

<sup>16</sup> ' I am sure it is a *Peul* girl. They are the only ones that give their daughters to marry at this age''



led to the foundation of Islamic States, including Senegal. Defeated by the British in 1903, the Fulani were divided among European colonisers. Before the arrival of the French, the present region of Kolda was part of the historical region of Fulado, the latest Kingdom established in Senegal<sup>17</sup> in the second half of the nineteenth century by Alpha Molo Balde, from the Peul-Firdu group. The kingdom was established after defeating the kingdom of Kaabu, a vassal of the Mali Empire (Mandinka), with the support of the Peul Fouta from the present Guinea-Bissau. After the death of Alpha Molo, the French colonists started to enter the region of Kolda in a significant way. In a strong resistance against colonisation, Alpha Molo's son was defeated and killed in Gambia in 1931.

Today, in post-colonial Kolda, a great deal of the population identifies as Peul-Firdu and Alpha Molo Balde is referred to as Alpha the Liberator. Particularly in Kolda town, references to the kingdom can be found in the form of names of districts, shops and schools. People living in the territories of what used to be the Fuladu Kingdom are mainly engaged in agriculture because in water is abundant, the vegetation is rich and wide range of fruits and legumes are cultivated. Besides a common history and similar modes of livelihoods, the Peul in this territory share the same religion and language. Therefore, it is common to find linkages between people from Kolda and Peul people from Guinea Bissau and Gambia.

#### 4.1.2 THE PEUL AND ISLAM

*Peul* people are traditionally Muslim, as they were one of the first groups in West Africa to embrace Islam (Knut, V., 2013). The *Peul* led many jihads between the medieval and pre-colonial era that spread Islam throughout West Africa and helped them dominate the region (Marion, J., 1976; van Beek, W., 1988). By the beginning of the twentieth century, most of Senegal was Islamic. Today, ninety-four percent of the country's population is estimated to be Muslim (CIA, 2017). In Senegal, the practice of Islam takes the form of membership to religious Sufi brotherhoods that are dedicated to their marabouts. The marabouts are the founders of the Brotherhood or current spiritual leaders. The two largest orders in Senegal are the Tijaniyyah and the Muridiyyah or Mourides. With the exception of a small minority of Christians<sup>18</sup>, the population in the region of Kolda is predominantly Muslim. All the research participants were Muslim. The practice of Islam was central in the daily life of people living in the ten rural communities in Kolda, the five daily prayers being the most evident. Young women and men learn the Quran at the Arabic schools. Although most study both at the French and Arabic schools, simultaneously or in different periods, there were cases of young women and men who only attended the Arabic school.

Research has identified religion as a factor influencing drivers of early marriage such as education, gender or contraception usage (African Union, 2015; Girls not Brides, 2016). However, the practice of early marriage is not tied to one faith, as it occurs across different religious settings. Still, literature suggests that religious leaders can have a crucial role to play in curbing the practice (Girls not Brides, 2016; Yarrow, 2015; ICRW, 2015; Walker, 2013; Walker,

<sup>17</sup> The Kingdom consisted of territories of present Kolda as well as northern Guinea-Bissau.

<sup>18</sup> Usually Diola with roots in the lower Casamance region, Ziguinchor, west of Kolda.

2012). Data from interviews I held with religious leaders in the ten rural communities in Kolda, support this argumentation line. In rural Kolda, it is the community religious leader who conducts the union of early marrying young women and men, despite the national laws against it. As Yarrow (2015) and Walker (2012, 2013) suggest, early pregnancies or prevention of premarital sex were mentioned by religious leaders in Kolda as a justification for marriages under the national legal ages. On the other hand, as the following quote shows, religious leaders in Kolda emphasised that the Quran is committed to advocating for children's rights:

*'Islam says that girls have also a voice. Islam prohibits forced marriages. Islam does not agree with early marriages. It is necessary to leave time for the maturity of the organs. Islam protects children. Right to education, health, from the convention in 89, it is all in the Islam'* (I.41, Imam)

With this discourse, religious leaders appeared as influential in parent's marriage decisions and among the community. A representative from a local organisation explained that religious leaders in rural Kolda can be more influential than the administrative leader 'Un chef religieux peut être plus important que l'administrative' (I.52, representative from a local organisation). Therefore, officially and community activities are usually opened by the religious leader with a short prayer.

#### 4.1.3 PULAAR AND THE POLITICS OF LANGUAGE IN SENEGAL

Pulaar, the language of all the Peul people<sup>19</sup>, is the daily used language in Kolda. People living in rural Kolda often only speak and understand Pulaar. Most research participants had a basic knowledge of French and only a few, particularly those who had studied longer, could speak it fluently. Pulaar, together with five other languages, is recognised in Senegal as a national language by the Constitution (Article 1). However, the only official language is French, despite French only being the native language for around two percent of the Senegalese population<sup>20</sup>. During the colonial era, African languages were denied, and at the moment of its independence in 1960, Senegal chose French as the official language.

After independence, language became a central issue for national building and its role in the education system became controversial. One on hand, the Negritude movement led by Leopold Sédar Senghor, defended that the education system should prepare African people to be open to other cultures while being rooted in African cultures and traditions. On the other hand, the African Renaissance defended by Cheik Anta Diop, advocated the use of local languages and criticised the use of foreign languages for being an obstacle to the education of young Africans. Senghor became the first President of the Republic of Senegal and therefore the linguistic politics are rooted in the Negritude philosophy. It has two main elements: the maintenance of French as the only official language, and the promotion of national languages to make it cultural languages (Diallo, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> There are different *Peul* dialects within and between countries, but they are all mutually intelligible

<sup>20</sup>The most spoken languages are Wolof (40%), Pulaar (26%), Serer (11%), Malinke (10), Diola (2%) and Soninke (2%), which are recognized as national languages by the Constitution (Article 1, Constitution, 2001).

Today, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of the inclusion of national languages in the formal education system to improve the quality of education (Assises de l'Education, 2014; USAID, 2015). However, French continues to dominate the formal education system. Scholars studying the politics of language in Senegal suggest that the prestige and power associated with education in the colonial language, together with the low literacy rate in both the colonial and national languages, widens the sociocultural, economic, and intellectual gaps between an elite class that is educated in the colonial language (French) and a majority that is illiterate in French (Diallo, 2010).

The medium of instruction in rural schools in the communities in Kolda was French while most young women and men were not fluent in that language or do not speak it at all. Fieldwork notes, as well as interviews with students and teachers in rural schools in the ten communities in Kolda, reveal that having French as the language of instruction is affecting young women and men's perceptions of the utility of school. Since the practice of early marriage is strongly associated with schooling, the politics of language become relevant to address and study the practice.

#### **4.2. PREVALENCE OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN SENEGAL AND KOLDA FROM AN AGE PERSPECTIVE**

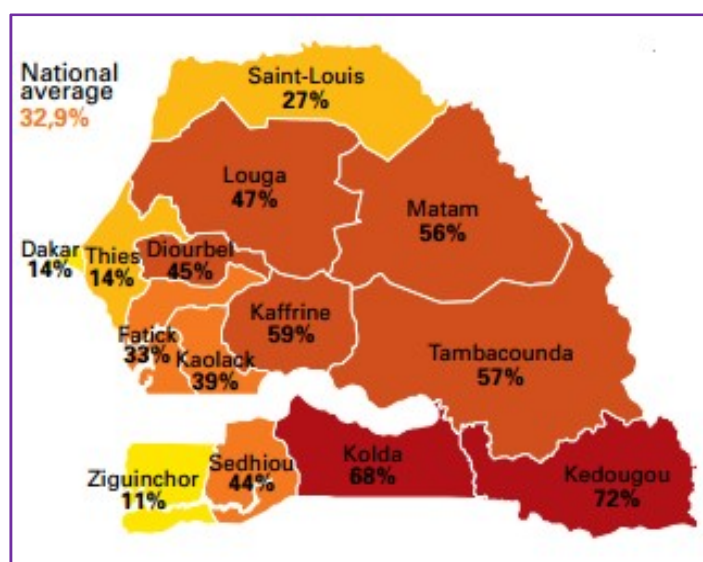
Early marriage rates in Senegal indicate that 32% of young women and men are married by the age of 18, and 9% by the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2016). National trends reveal strong differences among groups, particularly according to gender. Among the national population in the age rank 20-49 years, 34.9% of the women were first married by the age of 18, and 10.4% by the age of 15, while for the men 1.5% were first married by the age of 18, and 0.% by the age of 15 (Figure 5). Data also suggests correlations with wealth quintile, education levels, and region in Senegal. The higher rates are in the poorest wealth quintile (56.9% against 13.3 % in the richest), in lower education levels (54.5% no education, 31.2 % some primary and 43% completed primary), and in rural areas (46%) (Malé&Wodon, 2016). The median age at first marriage shows a similar association; while the national median age at first marriage for young women is now 20 years old, it is lower in rural areas (18) and for the lowest wealth quintile (17) (DHS, 2014).The region of Kolda and its neighbour region of Kedougou have the highest early marriage prevalence rates: 68% and 72% respectively (Figure 6). Moreover, in these regions rates have remained stable over the last three decades (UNICEF &ICWR, 2015).

**Figure 5: National trends of marriages by age 18 and 15 in Senegal**



*Source: Elaborated with DHS (2014) data*

**Map 3: Prevalence of marriages by age 18 per region**



*Source: UNICEF & ICWR (2015)*

Data on early marriage trends by region is very limited, and data within regions is largely absent. Kolda region is divided into three departments (Sédhiou, Kolda and Velingara), which are formed by different communes. Each commune has multiple communities and towns. Thus, the early marriage rate for Kolda region can vary between departments, communes and communities/towns. According to the database developed by the local organisation intervening in the 10 rural communities where the research took place, there are currently 32 cases of young men and women under the age of 19 who are already married, which represents a 6.48% of the total population within the age range of 12-18 years. The gender difference is very high, with 91% of the cases being among young women. The mean age of marriage in these cases is 15 years old. Of the 32 cases, 29 are between 15 and 18 years old, which represents 11.15% of

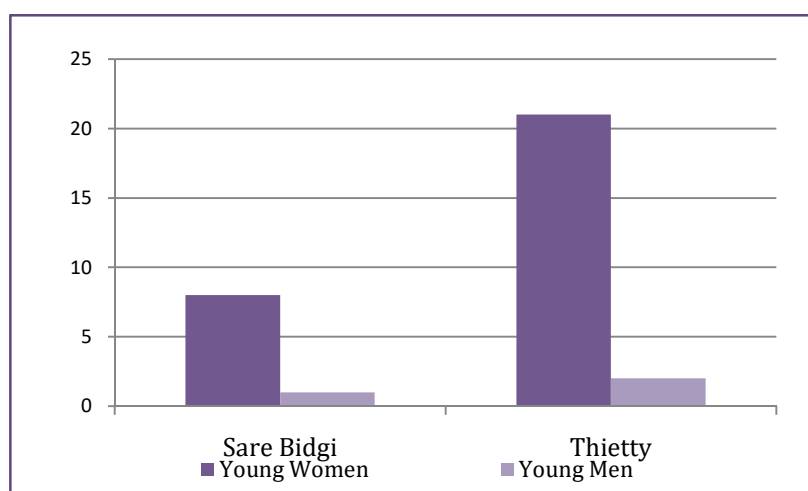
the total population within this age range (See descriptive statistics in annexes). As Table 4 details, the communities from the commune of Thietty have a higher number of early marriages. The commune of Thietty is further from the main town (Kolda) than the commune of Sare Bidgi, thus more rural. Thus, as visualised in figure 6 most early marriage cases in the research location were young women from the commune of Thietty. Moreover, most young married young women and men in these rural communities are still studying (62.5%), most at the secondary level (90%). Their active school status contradicts the association between early marriage and lower education in national data trends.

**Table 4: Marriage status of young women and men between 13 and 18 years old by 'commune'**

'Commune'	Gender	Married	N	%
SARE BIDGI	Young Men	1	103	0.90%
	Young Women	8	137	5.83%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>240</i>	<i>3,75%</i>
THIETTY	Young Men	3	79	3,79%
	Young Women	20	82	25%
	<i>Total</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>14,28%</i>

Source: ENDA JA database

**Figure 6: Distribution of cases of marriages under 19 by gender and commune**



Source: ENDA JA database

### 4.3 CONTEXT CONCLUSIONS

The chapter has provided a contextualization of the research location drawing on ethnicity, religion and language, and describing national and regional early marriage trends. All research participants, as well as most people living in the ten rural communities in Kolda are *Peul*, Muslim and their language is Pulaar. The historical background of the region can be explained in relation to these three elements, which in turn have been identified as influencing the drivers of early marriage such as gender, contraception usage and education. The *Perl* ethnicity has been

associated with traditional values that perpetuate practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation. Religion and religious leaders have an active role in curbing the practice, in that they conduct unions under national legal ages but are also found to advocate for children's rights. Language, particularly the politics of language that excludes African language from the formal education system, affects the quality of education in rural communities, which in turn has been identified as a driver of early marriages. Within this context, Kolda appears as one of the regions in Senegal with the highest early marriage rates. Rates do not only vary between and within regions but are also higher among young women, from the lowest wealth quintiles and with lower education levels. In the ten rural communities where the research is based, there are currently 32 cases of young women and men under 18 married, which represents 6.48% of the total population between 12 and 18 years old. The cases are concentrated among young women between 15 and 18 years old from the more rural commune of Thietty (21 cases).

## **5.6.7**

### **EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

In the following three chapters I present the findings that emerged from the data gathered in the ten communities in Kolda, Senegal. I aim to answer the main research question by building on the first three sub-questions. In the first empirical chapter I present what are young women and men's views on marriage and family (S.Q.1) as well as their preferences around marriage and family formation (S.Q.2). In the second chapter, I detail these views for the specific case when marriages are considered 'early', and link the delimitation of 'early' with views on sexuality (S.Q.2). With this picture of young women and men's understandings and preferences around family, marriage and sexuality, I discuss, in the third empirical chapter, who takes marriage decisions and how. By doing so, I highlight the ways in which young women and men appeared to exercise agency around marriage decisions, thus, answering S.Q.3. The last sub question on gender relations is addressed in the discussion.

## 5

### A FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

*'C'est le mariage qui forme une famille, sans le mariage il y aura pas une famille'<sup>21</sup>*

*Interview 30, Young men, 23, unmarried*



Picture 8: Children after collecting corn in the family house in Thietty where I was staying

In rural Kolda, families are the main unit of social organization and are structured around marital unions. Hence, the study of marriage requires an understanding of the broader family, as one is constitutive of the other. This chapter presents young women and men's views and preferences on marriage and family (formation), drawing primarily on semi-structured interviews. I first present how young women and men described family and marriage. This provides a picture of the composition and organization of families in rural Kolda. Then, by detailing the reasons young women and men provide as to the importance of family and marriage, I discuss the deeply functional view on family and marriage that participants seem to hold. I close the chapter by describing young women and men's preferences around marriage and family formation, particularly whether, when and who they want to marry and what are their desires in relation to having children.

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<sup>21</sup> 'It is marriage that forms a family, without marriage there will not be a family'



## 5.1 FAMILY AND MARRIAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Family descriptions by married and unmarried young women and men in rural Kolda revealed that families were large, extended and central to the social organization of communities. Large, because the nuclear family is numerous; and extended, because parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins live in the same house. In the words of a female participant: *“Nous sommes très nombreux, je sais pas combien des personnes”*<sup>22</sup> (I.24<sup>23</sup>, married young woman).

Several factors enlarge and extend the family. The practice of polygamy is common. According to participants, men could have up to four women, but more often have two or three: *‘Mon père a trois femmes’*<sup>24</sup> (I.33, married young woman). Each woman can have five, six, seven children. For example, a young woman described: *‘Du côté de mère et père, deux grand frères, une grand sœur, un petit frère et une petite sœur’*<sup>25</sup> (I.27, unmarried young woman). She had thus, five siblings, without counting her father’s sons and daughters with the other co-wives.

Moreover, young women and men were at times sent to live with other relatives, highlighting the importance attached to family ties. Often, as the following quote shows, the underlying reasons are linked with the gender division of labour, such as helping with the domestic and care work of other relatives:

*Je ne vis pas avec mes vrais parents. Je vis avec le jeune frère de mon papa et sa femme depuis que j’ai 9 ans. Ils avaient des problèmes pour avoir une fille. Quand sa femme a accouché des jumeaux alors il a appelé mon papa pour que je vais aider à sa femme pour s’occuper de ses jumeaux*<sup>26</sup> (I.14, unmarried young woman)

In cases such as the one illustrated by the quote, young women and men describe the family as the people with whom they live. Large families were usually found to live together on the same piece of land. However, as figure 8 shows, each nuclear family (father, mother, and children) has its own ‘dortoir’ which is a smaller house (see picture). Male members of the family build a ‘dortoir’ for their wife when they marry. When a man has more than one wife, each wife has her dormitory with her children. The husband would live in the two, three or four dormitories, often changing of dormitory every two days. When children get older and marry, young men stay and build their dormitory for their wife, and young women leave to live with their husband's family.

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<sup>22</sup> We are many, I do not know how many’

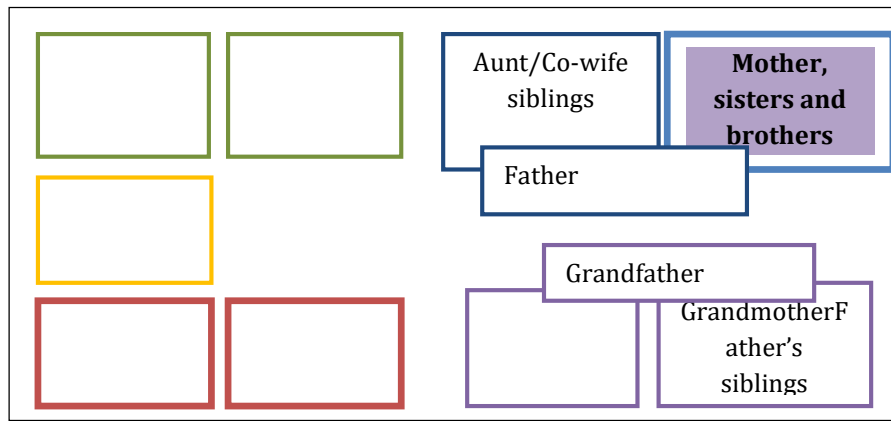
<sup>23</sup> I.24 refers to Interview number 24. The numbering refers to the list of respondents detailed in the annexes

<sup>24</sup> ‘My father has three wives’

<sup>25</sup> ‘On the side of mother and father, two big brothers, a big sister, a little brother and a little sister’

<sup>26</sup> ‘I do not live with my real parents. I live with my dad's younger brother and his wife since I was 9 years old. They had problems having a girl. When his wife gave birth to twins then he called my dad so that I would help his wife to take care of her twins’

Figure 6: Example of a 'family house'



However, while living within large and extended families, young women and men descriptions focused more on their smaller nuclear family units. Parents were the first mentioned (mother and father), followed by brothers and sisters from the same mother and father. Young women and men often ignored or signalled the separation of the father's co-spouses and their half-siblings. This focus on the nuclear family seems to be because the nuclear family is the one that covers the functions of the family, These functions are presented in the following sub-section.

## 5.2 A FUNCTIONAL VIEW OF FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

All young women and men interviewed considered family and marriage to be very important. The explanations of why family and marriage are so central suggested a functionalist view of family and marriage. Marriage and family were hereby not only regarded as a source of support, but also as a source of obligations and responsibilities.

### 5.2.1 'MA FAMILLE C'EST UN SOUTENNE POUR MOI'<sup>27</sup> : UNPACKING SUPPORT

Young women and men often referred to their families as the main and general source of support. When defined more specifically, the following three functions of family and marriage were most commonly mentioned: economic, social and reproductive.

#### Economic support

Participants' accounts indicated that the economic support provided through marriage and family was a key function, defined in relation to the means to cover young women and men's needs. Young people primarily spoke of needs in terms of food, shelter and clothing. Only one young man explicitly mentioned money: '*Quand je vais dans la rue ils m'aident avec l'argent. Si non, je reviens ici et ils me donnent repas et à manger*'<sup>28</sup> (I.6, unmarried young man). This quote evidences that economic support does not have to come in the form of money, but a more general coverage of basic needs.

Marriage also appeared to serve a central function in terms of covering needs, particularly those of young women '*C'est important par ce que le mari t'assiste dans le mariage, donc selon tes*

<sup>27</sup> 'My family is support for me'

<sup>28</sup> 'When I go down the street they help me with the money. If not, I come back here and they give me meals and food '

*besoins et selon ses capacités*<sup>29</sup>(I.27, unmarried young woman). Hence, young married women expressed their satisfaction within marriage in terms of being her needs covered *Je suis contente, rien me manque*<sup>30</sup>(I.32, married young woman). As these quotes illustrate, marriage becomes, for young women, a mode of livelihood.

The importance of economic support is related to the economic activities of the family where agriculture is the main and often the only one mode of livelihood. Most farming in rural Kolda is subsistence farming, so incomes are modest. Families work in the field, hence a large family is also a source of economic support, as it represents more labour force. In the words of a married young man: *'Si vous êtes nombreux, le travail de la terre, vous gagner beaucoup'*<sup>31</sup>(I.39, married young man). Marriage can also be a source of other forms of labour, particularly domestic work. Often, as the following quote shows, young men, usually the oldest son, marry so that their wives help their mothers with the domestic workload, especially when mothers get older:

*'L'importance que je vois dans le mariage c'est que ma maman elle avait commencé à devenir vieille et elle ne pouvait plus faire certains travaux. Donc que je me suis marié pour que ma femme puis la aider avec les travaux domestiques'*<sup>32</sup>(I. 7, married young man)

These quotes suggest that land and labour are the main economic resources of families in Kolda. Therefore, young women and men referred to the economic support function in terms of food and labour force rather than as monetary income.

### Socialisation and Social Support

Social relationships appeared as another valued function, specifically of the family. In rural communities socialisation occurs largely within the large and extended family. Young women and men highlighted that family ties provide companionship during important events such as marriages, births and funerals. In the words of a young woman: *'C'est important parce que si j'accouche ils viennent me rendre visite'*<sup>33</sup> (I.34, married young woman).

Moreover, young women and men's narratives suggest that most relationships of trust and support are kinship ties. Brothers and sisters were referred to by young women and men as their best confidants. As an example, in the following quote a young woman highlights the close communication bond with her brother. In her words *' C'est mon frère qui s'approche le plus de moi et qui me donne l'espace et le courage de lui parler'*<sup>34</sup> (I18, unmarried young woman). Mothers were also mentioned as important people with whom to discuss and get advice from.

Contrary, young women and men's relationships with their fathers appeared more distant for various reasons. In one case a young woman argued that there was no communication at all because of language differences: *'Je discute rarement avec mon père par ce que lui il parle que*

<sup>29</sup> 'It is important because your husband assists you in the marriage, according to your needs and according to his capacities'

<sup>30</sup> 'I'm happy, I don't lack anything'

<sup>31</sup> 'If you are many, the land work, you gain a lot'

<sup>32</sup> 'The importance that I see in marriage is that my mother started to become old and she could no longer do some work. So I got married so that my wife could help her with the housework'

<sup>33</sup> 'It is important because if I give birth they come to visit me'

<sup>34</sup> 'It is my brother who comes closest to me and gives me space and the courage to speak to him '

*Diola et nous on parle le Pular*<sup>35</sup> (I.16, unmarried young woman). Another young woman referred to polygamy as the reason why her relationship with her father was not close. In her words: *'Ma relation avec mon père est pas bonne, en premier lieu par ce que comme polygame tu ne peux pas aimer tout le monde. Ma maman n'était pas la chérie'*<sup>36</sup> (I.33, married young woman). These findings suggest that the emotional ties within the family are marked by the power dimension of gender relations. The more power difference between family members, the more distant their relationship was. The power dimension is based on two variables- age and gender-, and the oldest man holds the primary power. Therefore, the relationships father and younger daughters were the most distant. In other words, the social support function of the family varies among members and depends on the power dimension of gender relations.

#### Economic and Social: the case of education

Education was strongly related to family and marriage. Young women and men attributed their education to the family support they received, in both economic and social terms.

On the one hand, young women and men's education is directly dependent on the economic possibilities of their families to cover two main costs: the tuition fees and the notebooks. When families have difficulties, young women and men often have no other alternatives and drop out of school. Married young women depend on their husband's economic possibilities to cover these costs. As one young woman explained: *'C'est mon mari qui se charge de moi pour les études'*<sup>37</sup> (I.36, young married woman).

On the other hand, young women and men's education also depends on social support in the form of permission to attend school and to continue their studies. Participants accounts suggested that it was not uncommon for children to start school at a late age, or for children to discontinue because they did not have a birth certificate and therefore not being able to get diplomas. Moreover, young women and men's continuation of their studies also appeared to depend on not being asked to work to contribute to the family income and/or, in the case of young women, to marry to lessen the economic burden on the family. In the case of young married women, their continued school attendance depended on whether or not the husband gave his permission. These findings indicate that the study opportunities of young women and men are directly and only dependent on their families or husbands in the case of married young women. That is why young women and men talk about education when explaining the importance of family.

#### Reproduction

When asked about marriage, young women and men involved in the study immediately referred to the reproduction function, highlighting that family formation always takes place within marriage. The centrality of the reproductive function of marriage was related to the sexual norm that sexual relationships are only permitted within marital unions. Moreover, as the following

<sup>35</sup>'I rarely discuss with my father because he speaks Diola and we speak the Pular'

<sup>36</sup>'My relationship with my father is not good, in the first place because as polygamous you cannot love everyone. My mum was not the darling'

<sup>37</sup>'It is my husband who takes care of me for the studies'

quote shows, children are seen a future source of economic and social support: *'Le mariage c'est important par ce que c'est les enfants, demain, ce sont qui vont te succéder, qui t'aideront, te donneront place'*<sup>38</sup> (I. 28, married young woman). The quote indicates that also reproduction appeared to be seen from a functional view, as having children was seen as necessary to secure the future. These findings link directly with participants references to the family as a source of responsibilities and obligations, which are presented below.

## 5.2.2 'IL FAUT TOUJOURS PENSER A LA FAMILLE'<sup>39</sup>: A SOURCE OF OBLIGATIONS

Although the family was generally regarded to be the main source of general support, young women and men also referred to the functions of family and marriage as a source of obligations and responsibilities. As with support, the expressed responsibilities were both economic and social.

Young men often referred to economic responsibilities towards their family, particularly their siblings; for example, in the words of a young man: *'Mes parents ne pouvait pas tout gérer, par ce que on était un peu nombreux. Donc que j'ai abandonné l'école pour aller cherche ailleurs du travail'*<sup>40</sup> (I. 13, unmarried young man). Young women also explained in several cases that because of their domestic responsibilities, once married, they could not continue with their studies: *'Il disait que le raison que lui on pousser à me prendre comme épouse c'est de venir aider à sa maman dans le travaux de la maison, donc que je ne pouvais pas aller à l'école'*<sup>41</sup>, (I.20, married young woman). In other words, young women and men are attached to their families and marriages by economic responsibilities.

Moreover, marriage was also described as an obligation in and of itself. As the following quotes show, the obligation of marriage was mainly linked to religion and to gender norms.

*'C'est quelque chose que on doit faire, la religion nous le dite'*<sup>42</sup>(I.11, unmarried young man)

*'Le valeur de la femme c'est le mariage et quel que soit l'argent que on as, le travail que on a, la plus noble aspiration c'est le mariage'*<sup>43</sup> ( I. 14, unmarried young woman).

Whether related to religion or gender, the obligation of marriage seemed assumed without major problems. However, particularly women, sometimes mentioned that marriage can be hard: *'Les souffrances que on vie dans la maison, par ce que souvent c'est que vive nos maman, donc si nos maman ont survécu, nous aussi nous allons survivre'*<sup>44</sup>( I.14, unmarried young

<sup>38</sup>'Marriage is important because children, tomorrow, they are the ones that will succeed you, who will help you, will give you place'

<sup>39</sup>'We always have to think about the family'

<sup>40</sup>'My parents could not manage everything because we were many. So I left school to search work elsewhere '

<sup>41</sup>'He said that the reason for him to take me as a wife was to come and help his mother with all the house work, so I could not go to school'

<sup>42</sup>'This is something we must do, religion tells us'

<sup>43</sup>'The value of women is marriage and whatever money one has, the work one has, the noblest aspiration is marriage

<sup>44</sup>'The sufferings that one lives in the house, is often what our mothers live, so if our mamma have survived, we too will survive '

woman). This quote suggests that young women and men do not only have a positive image of family and marriage but accept the negative sides.

To recap, data indicates that family and marriage were regarded as both a central provider of various forms of support and demand. Still, young women and men have, in general, a positive view of family and marriage as they very much value the support they receive from both.

### 5.3 YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN'S PREFERENCES AROUND MARRIAGE AND FAMILY FORMATION

In line with the centrality and importance attributed to family and marriage, all young women and men expressed that they do want to marry and have children. At the same time, participants showed preferences around when and who to marry as well as when to have children and how many. All these findings are presented below.

#### 5.3.1 'LA PLUS NOBLE ASPIRATION C'EST LE MARRIAGE'<sup>45</sup>: PREFERENCES ON WHEN AND WHO TO MARRY

As the quote in the title suggests, young women and men taking part in the study regarded marriage as aspirational and, implicitly, as something everyone would desire. None of the unmarried participants appeared to question this implicit inevitability of (their) marriage or those of other community members.

##### When to marry

Although marriage regulations and (early) marriage programs take age as the central criterion to determine when marriage should and/or can take place, age did not appear to be a central factor in young women and men's descriptions of when to marry. Some young women and men were unsure about their own age, in the words of one young unmarried woman: *'Je ne sais pas quel âge j'ai'*<sup>46</sup> (I. 18, unmarried young woman). This quote is in line with the low birth registration rates in rural Kolda. According to ENDA JA database, in the communities of Thietty and Sare Bidgi the rates of children without birth certificates are 51% and 28% respectively.

Similarly, married young women and men did not appear to know the exact age of their husbands or wives. When asked about her husband, one married young woman indicated that: *'Mon mari il est d'ici de le village, je sais pas son age'*<sup>47</sup> (I.35, married young woman). The quote suggests that age is not the most important characteristic to decide who to marry. Also, young women and men did not have a clear definition as to what was a proper age to marry. To the question of what is a proper age to marry, answers varied from 15 until 30.

Instead, references on when to marry were mainly defined in relation to young women and men's educational aspirations. Young women and men tended to emphasise that they would first want to continue a bit further with their studies before getting married: *'Je voudrais d'abord*

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<sup>45</sup> 'The noblest aspiration is marriage'

<sup>46</sup> 'I do not know my age'

<sup>47</sup> 'My husband is from this village, I do not know his age'

*aller un peu loin avec mes études, avant de penser au mariage*<sup>48</sup> (I.19, unmarried young woman). Some young men and a few young women also mentioned their will to go to university.

However, particularly young women's accounts suggested that there was not a concrete aspiration to reach a certain level of studies but rather to simply continue until they would be older and marry. This relationship between education and marriage is further illustrated by the following quote: *'Même si c'est aujourd'hui je suis prête d'aller me marier, je ne vais plus à l'école'*<sup>49</sup> (I.26, unmarried young woman). Thus, young women described a very direct relation education-marriage with no in-between options(aspirations??), or they study or they marry.

Among young men, their socio-economic status also appeared to be a key determinant in deciding when to marry. In the words of a young man: *'Bon, si je reçois un boulot, après je préfère de chercher une femme'*<sup>50</sup> (I.30, unmarried young man). The quote indicates that before marrying young men need to have the means pay a bride price and cover the wife's needs.

### Who to marry

The characteristics young women and men involved in the study indicated they would value in their potential spouse to be, seemed strongly related to the gendered roles within the family and marriage. Illustrative of young women's views regarding a 'good' man is the following quote taken from an interview with an unmarried young woman: *'Quand j'accepterai de me marier avec un homme c'est par ce que c'est un homme qui accepte de bien travailler, c'est un homme qui saura prendre soin de moi'*<sup>51</sup> (I.14, unmarried young woman). So, young women value a husband that covers their needs.

For young men, a young woman should be serious and educated, referring to their politeness and attention to family members. Young women and men described that before proposing marriage to a young woman, the young men and/or his family observes how the young women behaved within her own family, to assess if she will be a 'good housewife'. Data, therefore, suggests that young men and women expected their (future) wife and husband to fulfil their gendered roles.

Young women and men also highlighted the importance of respect for elders. In the words of a young woman: *'Avoir un bon mari c'est avoir un homme qui respecte tes parents'*<sup>52</sup> (I.26, unmarried young woman). The quote shows how age-based hierarchies influence marriage preferences.

The accounts young women and men provided did not contain any references to romantic love. Married young women and men, when asked about the satisfaction with their marriage would

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<sup>48</sup> 'I Would like to go a bit further with my studies before thinking about marriage'

<sup>49</sup> 'Even if it's today I'm ready to go get married, I'm not going to school anymore'

<sup>50</sup> 'Well, If I get a job, then I will look for a wife'

<sup>51</sup> 'When I accept to marry a man it is because it is a man who agrees to work well, he is a man who will take care of me'

<sup>52</sup> 'Having a good husband means having a man who respects your parents'

often answer '*On est en paix*'<sup>53</sup>(I.34, married young woman), suggesting that the importance is the lack of conflict and that needs are covered.

Finally, particularly young men emphasized that they would not marry their girlfriends. As one young married man clarified: '*J'ai jamais eu envie de la marier. Par ce que nous, notre famille trouve que c'est pas bien de marier ta copine*'<sup>54</sup>(I.22, married young man). This influence of social norms such as not marrying teenage girl/boyfriends resonates with the notion of symbolic gender relations in that the meaning and importance attributed to young women's virginity until marriage influences who young men can and want to marry.

#### 5.4.2 'JE VEUT AVOIR SIS OU SEPT ENFANTS'<sup>55</sup>

All young women and men indicated they wished to have children when they were married. The number of desired children varied from three to seven children. When wanting 'only' three, young men and women argued economic reasons. As the number of desired children is high, there is often no wish to control the number of births. Several young women and men expressed that they would or were not using family planning within marriage. Moreover, although married young women seemed to have a bit more information about contraceptive methods, in general, young women and men's knowledge of family planning methods appeared to be very limited.

A tradition in communities is that women with little babies do not sleep with their husbands precisely to manage the frequency of births. Therefore, as the following quote indicates, the spacing of births through abstinence is the preferred and most common method: '*Je pourrais m'abstenir pour qu' on espace les naissances, mais jamais de planning*'<sup>56</sup>(I.12, unmarried young woman). Only in two cases, married young women mentioned modern contraceptive methods (vaccinations), as a recommendation of doctors to space births, particularly when they are younger. A fifteen years old married young woman explained: '*Piqûre, par ce que maintenant je veux me reposer*'<sup>57</sup> (I.35, married young woman). These quotes suggest that there is still a stronger preference for traditional family planning within marriage.

Moreover, young women and men emphasised that family planning decisions should always be first discussed with the husband, e.g.: '*Une femme marié ne peut pas faire son planning sans involucre la responsabilité de son marie*'<sup>58</sup>(FG1, unmarried young man). Young women argued that even if they have a high number of children they would not do family planning if their husbands do not agree because they have to obey their husbands: '*Si mon marie ne veut pas, je vais pas le faire. On doit obéir nos maris*' (FG2, unmarried young woman). These findings suggest that the power dimension of gender relations also influences family planning decisions because

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<sup>53</sup>'We are in peace'

<sup>54</sup> 'I never wanted to marry her. Because we, our families do not think it is good to marry your girlfriend'

<sup>55</sup>'I want to have six or seven children'

<sup>56</sup>'I could abstain by spacing births, but never planning'

<sup>57</sup>'Vaccine, because now I want to rest'

<sup>58</sup>'A married women cannot manage her planning without involving her husband's responsibility'



although married couples can discuss family planning options, the final decisions rely on the husband.

Young women and men emphasised that before marriage they did not want children. The high rate of teenage pregnancies proves that young women and men might be sexually active before marriage. However, only one young man mentioned that he would use a condom. '*Avec ma copine je vais utiliser des préservatifs. Et avec ma femme aussi.*'<sup>59</sup>(I.10, unmarried young man). Most young women and men responded that the only contraceptive method they use before marriage was abstinence, even if they acknowledged having a boyfriend or girlfriend.

## 5.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have detailed young women and men's views and preferences around family and marriage. Families in rural Kolda were found to be large and extended. The practice of polygamy, a high number of children per woman, and the importance of kinship ties enlarged the family. Still, young women and men's family descriptions focused on the more nuclear unit. The view of family and marriage appeared functional, with an emphasis on the socio-economic and reproductive functions. Young women and men highlighted family and marriage as the main source of support, and their narratives also evidenced their own obligations and responsibilities in kinship ties. All young women and men wanted to marry and have children. These preferences appeared rational, influenced by gender arrangements and suggested limited information in relation to contraception methods. Having described young women and men's general understanding of family and marriage and their preferences around both, next section explores when marriage and family formation become 'problematic'.

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<sup>59</sup>'With my girlfriend, we will use preservatives. And with my wife as well'

## 6

### WHEN MARRIAGES AND PREGNANCIES ARE PROBLEMATIC: DEFINING 'EARLY'

*'Pas des grossesses précoces, pas des mariages d'enfants'<sup>60</sup>*

*(Slogan developed during SRHR workshop with ENDA JA team)*



Picture 9: Member of ENDA JA during the organisational workshop on SRHR

Despite the general positive descriptions of family and marriage, and young women and men's clear preference to marry and have children, marriages and particularly pregnancies deemed to be 'early' were one of the issues of greatest concern among rural communities in Kolda. However, the delimitation of early in relation to marriage was not straightforward. The practice of 'early' marriage appeared to be strongly related to conceptions around sexuality and, in turn, the concerns around pregnancies. Therefore, in this chapter, I first define 'early' in relation to sexuality and pregnancies. Then, I detail the direct implications of early sexuality and early pregnancies in the practice of 'early' marriage. Finally, I close the chapter by highlighting how all these views are influencing the approaches in addressing 'early' marriage.

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<sup>60</sup> 'No early pregnancies, no early marriages'

## 6.1 EARLY SEXUALITY

As with marriage and family, the understanding of sexuality<sup>61</sup> in rural Kolda also appeared to be very functional. Sexual activity was expected to happen only within marriage and for reproductive means. Although some young men did talk about sexual desires, pleasure was never referred to<sup>62</sup>. Within marriage sexual activity had to be moderated and outside marriage sexual desires had to be controlled. In other words, the expression of sexual desires seemed to be only approved for reproductive means. Participants' accounts referred to Islam, traditional practices and societal values as the justifications of this view of sexuality, which at the same time evidenced a lack of knowledge and information were myths around sexuality were taken very seriously by the entire community and even by experts.

For example, a local gender expert explained how young women can become sexually obsessed as a consequence of early marriage *'Parfois la conséquence est que elles deviennent obsédé sexuel. Quand elles ont commencé à avoir des rapports sexuels, après les organes en ont besoin'*<sup>63</sup>(Day event on children's rights, local gender expert). Also, a young man reflected about the effects of food in sexual desire during a community chat about early sexuality *'L'envie d'avoir des rapports sexuelles peut être par ce que maintenant on utilise des ingrédients non naturels dans notre alimentation'*<sup>64</sup>(Community chat, young man). These quotes illustrate the presence of myths in participants understandings of sexuality.

In this context, what determined when young women and men could be sexually active was their marital status. As young women and men were supposed to remain virgin until marriage, pre-marital sexual relations, including young women and men's non-expressed sexual desires before getting married, were referred to as early sexuality. However, community narratives highlighted that young women and men's attitudes are not in accordance with these sexual norms. Therefore early sexuality appeared as a strong concern, particularly among older population groups.

In a community debate, a woman's intervention expressed the concern around youth sexual activity by raising the question: *'Pourquoi les jeunes filles ne s'abstiennent pas aujourd'hui? Elles sont trop curieuses'*<sup>65</sup> (Woman, community debate). In the same debate, an older man proposed the creation of a commission to look out when young women go to young men's houses. In his words: *'On peut créer une commission pour regarder les filles et quand on voit que elles vont chez les garçons on peut les frapper'*<sup>66</sup> (Man, community debate). These quotes highlight a strong concern around early sexuality.

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<sup>61</sup>Community narratives talk about 'early sexuality', which sometimes seems to be used as a synonym of sexual relationships, but other times also included references to desires and sexual drives. In this section, I try to stick to how the term was used during fieldwork by the research participants.

<sup>62</sup>I understand that sexual desires (expressed or non-expressed) are not the same as pleasure.

<sup>63</sup>Sometimes the consequence is that they become obsessed with sex. When they started having sex, then the organs need it '

<sup>64</sup>'The desire to have sexual intercourse may be due to the fact that now we use non-natural ingredients in our diet'

<sup>65</sup>'Why do young girls not abstain today? They are too curious'

<sup>66</sup>'We can create a commission to watch girls and when we see that they go to the boys' houses we can hit them '

Hence, sexuality messages were built and spread with evident contradictions in practice: in group talks about sexuality, participants, especially adults, insisted on the strong sexual morality (abstinence until marriage), while most young women listening were carrying babies or were pregnant. Some young men did explicitly express contradictions of limiting sexuality only within marriage. However, as the following excerpt from a community 'chat' on early sexuality shows, adults, facilitators and even other youth responded emphasising the importance of inhibiting and controlling any sexual desire.

Young man: *'Quand on dorme parfois on se réveille humide. Ça veut dire que on a envie. Alors si c'est naturel, c'est mieux de le faire avec une fille.'*<sup>67</sup>

Facilitator: *Non. Ça veut pas dire ça. Il faut bien penser a les conséquences.*<sup>68</sup>

This excerpt illustrates how young men's references to sexual desires were addressed from a preventive approach to early sexuality. Still, young men often argued that abstinence is difficult. The following quote is an intervention of a young man in a community 'chat' on early sexuality who explained that the practice of circumcision used to indicate the transition to adulthood, which also represented that men could be sexually active. Nowadays, he argued, circumcision takes place at a very early age, and young men marry at later ages (27-28). Hence, there is no clear reference and abstinence becomes very difficult.

*'Avant, on devenait homes quand on faisait la circoncision. Maintenant on fait la circoncision depuis que on est petits, alors, comment on sait quand on devient home et on peut avoir des rapports sexuelles? L'abstinence est difficile'*<sup>69</sup> (Young man, Community chat on early sexuality)

These quotes show that in a context of changing practices –earlier circumcision and later marriage- young men find themselves with no clear references to when they can be sexually active. The findings on sexuality views suggest a confrontation between strong sexual norms and young women and men's sexual behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, in open talks only young men expressed these confrontations while young women generally remained silent. This difference might be related to a general attribution of the causes on 'early sexuality' on young women, which are explored in the following sub-section.

### 6.1.1 THE CAUSES OF 'EARLY' SEXUALITY

Community narratives attributed early sexuality to two main causes, both dependent on young women: young women's materialism using sex as a transaction, and an increased sexual drive among young women.

<sup>67</sup> 'When you sleep sometimes you wake up wet. That means we want to. So if it's natural, it's better to do it with a girl'

<sup>68</sup> No. It does not mean that. We have to think about the consequences.

<sup>69</sup> 'Before, we became men when we were circumcised. Now we are circumcised when we are little, so how do we know when we become men and we can have sex? Abstinence is difficult '

First, the use of sex as a transaction was widely mentioned among different members of the community: young men, young women, adult women, adult men as well as external people working in addressing early marriage. The argumentations focused on young women's use of sex as a mean to get money, clothes, and mobile phones and it was associated with young women's materialism influenced by modernization and the loss of values. In the words of a young man : *' Les jeunes filles elles veulent des habile, des habile modern, alors elles cherchent les jeunes garçons, et après les jeunes garçons veulent des relations sexuelles en retour'*<sup>70</sup> (Young man, community debate). Moreover, young men also referred to young women's mothers as beneficiaries of this transactions and therefore sometimes influencing them: *'Parfois ce sont pas les jeunes filles, mais ses mères qui veulent de l'argent. Les homes peuvent financier les deux, les jeunes filles et les mamans.'*<sup>71</sup>(Young man, community debate). These quotes indicate that only women are blamed for using sex as materialistic means.

In debates around the use of sex as a transactional means, there was no mention of young women's little access to economic resources (production gender relations). Instead, community narratives emphasized that the responsibility relied on young women, as they are seen as the ones that go after men. In the words of a woman: *'Le problème sont les jeunes filles. Souvent les jeunes garçons ne les cherchent pas, ce sont les jeunes filles qui vont a les maisons de les jeunes garçons et les cherchent, après, ils font ce que ils font'*<sup>72</sup>(Woman, community dialogue). Men's asking something in return was not problematized: *'Si on donne quelque chose, on donne pas seulement comme ça. On espère toujours quelque chose en retour. Nous on travaille, les filles elles ne travaillent pas'*<sup>73</sup>(Young man, community dialogue). These quotes show that only one side of the sex-transactions was blamed. Participants reflections never mentioned or considered young men's use of money as a mean to engage in sexual relationships. However, these findings suggest that power and economic gender inequalities (production and power gender relations) could influence the use of sex as a transactional mean

The second cause that community narratives related to early sexuality were young women's increased sexual drive and curiosity. This was attributed to two factors, on one hand, the influence of 'pornographic videos'<sup>74</sup>in young women's phones. In the words of a gender expert: *'Aujourd'hui c'est déplorable. Tous les jeunes filles ont des téléphones et ce que elles regardent c'est déplorable. Elles regardent des vidéos pornographique'*<sup>75</sup>, *après elles sont stimulé et les perdent la virginité'*<sup>76</sup> (Local gender expert, day event on children's rights). On the other hand, as an effect of

<sup>70</sup>Young women want clothes, modern clothes, so they look for young men, and then young boys want sex in return'

<sup>71</sup>'Sometimes it's not young women, but their mothers who want money. Men can finance both, young women and their mothers. '

<sup>72</sup> 'The problem is young women. Often young men do not look for them, it is young women who go to the houses of young men and look for them, then do what they do'

<sup>73</sup>'If we give something, we do not give not just like that. We always hope for something in return. We work, young women do not work '

<sup>74</sup> References to pornographic videos included any video interpreted as sexually explicit, for example, some music video clips.

<sup>75</sup> When participants referred to videos pornographic, this mainly referred to video clips with dancing and clothing that are referred to as pornographic.

<sup>76</sup>'Today it is deplorable. All the girls have phones and what they look at is deplorable. They watch pornographic videos after they are stimulated and lose them virginity '

the loss of traditional practices, namely female circumcision. Several adults, particularly religious leaders and older men, expressed that female circumcision also served to reduce young women's sexual drive. As the following quote shows, a community leader argued that early pregnancies –outside marriage– are a more recent concern: *'Comme on a évincer la circoncision, tout ça c'est des problèmes maintenant avec les filles. Avant ça n'existait pas le problème de les grossesses précoces'*<sup>77</sup> (1.43, community leader). Therefore, these participants made the association between the increasing loss of the practice of female circumcision with the increase of early sexuality and, therefore, early pregnancies.

The attribution of the causes of early sexuality on young women indicates a double sexual morality based on gender. Moreover, in this double morality, participants' narratives highlighted a change in young women's sexual behaviour. Thus, a gender inequality in relation to sexual morality, and a change in gender relations expressed in the form of closer relationships interpreted as sexual desires that often lead to 'early' sexual engagements. The clearest evidence of early sexual relationships is early pregnancies.

## 6.2 EARLY PREGNANCIES

As pregnancies are a direct evidence of sexual activity, early pregnancies appeared as a stronger concern than early sexuality by itself. However, early pregnancies are seen as an issue not only for its relation to the violation of sexual norms but also for health-related complications. In both cases, early pregnancies have a direct implication in the practice of 'early' marriages.

First, pregnancies were defined as early when contracted without being married. In this case, pregnancies are the direct consequence of early sexuality and a strong dishonour for the family of the pregnant woman. The fear of being dishonoured was widely mentioned among parents. Having children before marriage goes against all the community values and is therefore seen as shame for the families, where the pressure and judgments of the rest of the community are central. While having children outside marriage is not well seen for neither young women nor young men, family dishonour is mainly attached to the daughters' pregnancies. An early pregnancy by young women is judged as a lack of education and lack of values, of which parents, especially mothers, are seen as the responsible ones. In the words of a mother: *'Parfois nos maris disent que c'est notre responsabilité, que les mamans on laisse les filles aller voir le copain pendant la nuit, mais c'est pas vrai'*<sup>78</sup> (Married woman, chat)

The concern towards early pregnancies is also related to stronger difficulties for young women to receive a marriage proposal who will be more dependent on their parents. Not only young women but also the babies, since pregnancies are seen as a responsibility that often only young women will have to carry with. In the words of a young woman from one of the communities: *'C'est pas bien vu par la société, la société africaine, et quand tu as des enfants sans être marié c'est un déshonneur pour ta famille, c'est un déshonneur pour les gens qui te font confiance et les gens*

<sup>77</sup>'As we have ousted circumcision, that is why all these problems now with young women. Before that did not exist, the problem of early pregnancies'

<sup>78</sup>'Sometimes our husbands say it's our responsibility, that moms let the girls go see their boyfriends during the night, but it's not true'

*ne te respectent pas. Même si on devait, on te respecte pas*<sup>79</sup> (I.14, unmarried young woman). The quote adds that dishonour is also attached to a loss of respect from the rest of the community.

The second reason for which communities were concerned about pregnancies was maternal mortality. In rural communities in Kolda, young women still lose their life while giving birth. In Kolda the maternal mortality ratio is double than the national ratio which is 315 per 100.000 live births (WHO, 2015). Although this issue is decreasing, there is increased awareness among community populations towards the health risks that young women confront when carrying a pregnancy when their bodies are not mature enough. Here, again, age did not appear as the main variable of reference to analyse young women's health risks. Several cases of young married women at the age of 15- 16 were found where pregnancies had not had any complications and there had been no worries. Thus, the health risk concern is more related to the physical maturity of young women's bodies, which is not strictly defined by age categories and can vary between women.

#### 6.2.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF EARLY PREGNANCIES IN THE PRACTICE OF (EARLY) MARRIAGE

The two cases detailed in which pregnancies are a concern for being early - dishonour and maternal mortality- have a direct implication in the practice of early marriage.

On one hand, the parent's fear to be dishonoured with an early pregnancy by their unmarried daughters appeared as the main reason for parents to give their daughters in early marriage. All members of the communities: fathers, mothers, young men, young women, teachers and leaders identified early pregnancies as the main cause for early marriages. Illustrative of this view is the following quote:

*'La cause de le mariage forcé c'est par craindre de les grossesses précoce. Si les parents les font c'est par ce que ils craint les grossesses précoce. Les filles ne s'abstiennent pas, alors ils vont contracter par curiosité la sexualité précoce. C'est la que les parents ne veulent cette humiliation'*<sup>80</sup> (I.30, young man, unmarried)

The quote highlights the relation between early pregnancies and 'early' marriages: to prevent pregnancies outside marriage, parents opt for earlier marriages. On the other hand, the increased concern about maternal mortality linked to early pregnancies -non-mature bodies- leads to a practice of early marriage that separates the contraction of marriage from the consummation of marriage. In other words, the agreement between the families is made, the bride price is paid, but the wife and husband do not live together to not have sexual relationships that could lead to a risky pregnancy.

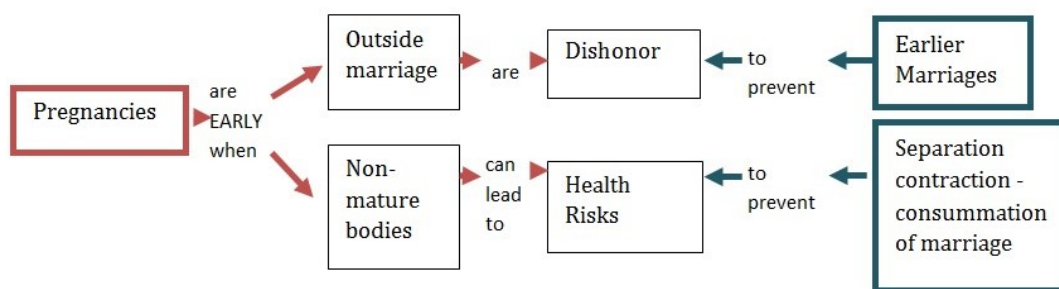
Figure 9 visualises these two implications of early pregnancies in the practice of early marriage

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<sup>79</sup>'It is not well seen by society, African society, and when you have children without being married it is a disgrace for your family, it is a disgrace for the people who trust you and the people do not respect you not. Even if we should, we do not respect you '

<sup>80</sup>'The cause of forced marriage is the fear of early pregnancy. If parents do this is because they fear early pregnancies. Girls do not abstain, so due to curiosity they have early sexuality. This is when parents do not want this humiliation'

**Figure 7: Implications of early pregnancies in the practice of early marriage**



*Own elaboration*

### 6.3 EARLY MARRIAGES

Unlike with sexuality and pregnancies, the delimitation of 'early' in relation to marriage was less straightforward. Community narratives often talked about both advantages and negative effects of 'early' marriages suggesting that 'early' marriages were not always seen as a problem by itself. Community narratives suggested that the main concerns around early marriages were related to the health risks associated with early pregnancies, particularly obstetric fistula and maternal mortality.

The mentioned advantages in relation to early marriages were mainly two. First, the prevention of early sexuality. Community populations, including young women, often mentioned that 'early' marriages are good when young women are at risk of getting pregnant, that is when young women show an interest in young men. QUOTE. In these cases, early marriages are justified for protecting the family honour. Second, parents, as well as young women, argued that when young women do not study, marriage is the best option. In the words of a young woman *'Le mariage précoce c'est pas quelque chose de bien, mais si tu ne faites rien, tu étudies pas, tu ne travailles pas, meilleur que on te donne en mariage'*<sup>81</sup> (Interview 16, young woman, unmarried). On that view, several fathers of unmarried young women argued that if their daughters showed interest in school, they would not be given into marriage. Moreover, also some young women expressed that when they do not want to continue with their studies, they prefer to marry.

The early marriage practice that separates the contraction of marriage from the consummation, evidences this two-sided view of early marriage as the separation allows keeping the advantages –prevent family dishonour- while reducing the negative effects –health risks. Moreover, this contraction-consummation separation also facilitates young women's continuation of studies because although they are married, their responsibilities are yet not the ones of a married wife. Thus, although being married their domestic workload is less and can, therefore, can better focus on their studies. For example, in the following quote a married young woman explains she still lives with her parents to continue her studies: *'Je suis marié mais je ne suis pas encore avec mon mari. En ce moment je ne veux pas aller vivre au domicile conjugal, je*

<sup>81</sup> 'Early marriage is not something good, but if you do not do anything you do not study, you do not work, the better you get in marriage'



*veux étudier*<sup>82</sup>(I.8, married young woman married). This quote suggests that the separation contraction-consummation of marriage was facilitating the continuation of married young women's studies.

These findings suggest that rather than early marriage self, the main concerns are early sexuality and early pregnancies. Therefore, the delimitation of when a marriage is 'early' is not straightforward and not based on age. There seems to not be a strict definition of 'early marriage'. Hence, young women and men's answers to what was a good age to marry varied enormously from 15 to 30 years old.

### 6.3.1 HOW IS EARLY MARRIAGE BEING ADDRESSED

In this context in rural Kolda, strategies aimed at addressing 'early' marriage, as well as narrative around the practice of 'early' marriage are focused on eliminating or at least reducing early pregnancies. This is well reflected in the main current programmatic strategy around early marriages: the clubs of young women. The strategy is implemented by the local administration as well as by ENDA JA project. These clubs consist of creating a space where young women strengthen their leadership skills and receive various training about topics such as early sexuality and early pregnancies. These young women are supposed to be a model for the rest of the young women in their communities. The base of the strategy is that to enter, young women make an agreement with their parents: young women promise to not get pregnant, and parents promise to not give them into marriage.

The increasing concerns around early pregnancies, force the need to break the silence around sexuality and bringing the issue to the table for discussion. In the words of a project officer: '*La planification familiale c'est un mal nécessaire*<sup>83</sup>(Responsible for a local project on early marriage) However, the discourses are very attached to sexual morality leaving little space for topics such as family planning. There is a strong fear and idea that talking about family planning or sexual education is promoting early sexuality. This fear is illustrated in the words of a representative of a local organisation: '*La planification familiale est pour les couples et les familles, pas pour les jeunes femmes. Nous devons faire très attention à ne pas provoquer la sexualité précoce*<sup>84</sup>(Representative local organisation). The quote evidences the association between family planning with the violation of sexual norms.

In this context, when addressed, the approach to sexuality is mainly preventive, highlighting the consequences and risks of being sexually active. Narratives highlight the negative consequences of early sexuality: early pregnancies, dishonour and health problems sexuality transmitted diseases, promoting abstinence as the only solution. The promotion of abstinence as the only family planning method lead to various contradictory messages. As an example, in a session about family planning, the moderator was presenting different methods including male and

<sup>82</sup>, 'I am married but I am not yet with my husband. At the moment I do not want to go to the marital home, I want to study '

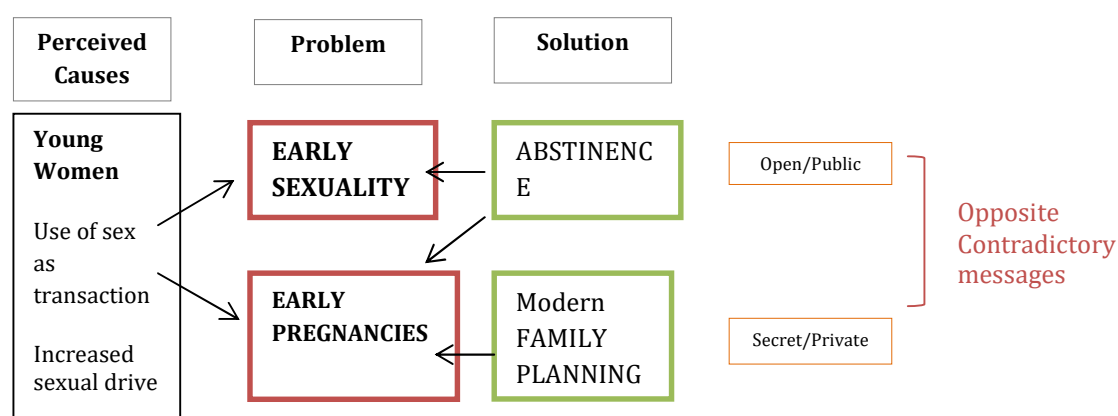
<sup>83</sup>, 'Family planning is a necessary evil'

<sup>84</sup>, 'Family planning is for couples and families, not for young women. We must be very careful not to provoke sexuality early '

female condoms. While explaining various methods, the facilitator emphasised that abstinence was the best one. *‘La planification familial n’empêche pas les maladies de transmission sexuel’*<sup>85</sup> (*Facilitator of community chat on sexuality*). In other words, family planning is explained but not recommended.

Contradictory messages also appeared in the practice. For example, participants in community dialogues mentioned that mothers secretly take their young unmarried daughters to get planning vaccinations to reduce the risks of early pregnancies. These findings indicate that while preventing early pregnancies appeared as the main approach to address early marriage, messages around early pregnancies were contradictory. That is, messages in the private sphere seemed to be different than the general open public discourse. Figure 9 visualises the main approaches addressing early marriage:

**Figure 8: Approaches to address early marriage**



*Own elaboration*

## 6.4 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented data suggesting that in Kolda the delimitation of when a marriage is considered ‘early’ is not straightforward because age was not the main criterion that guided when to marry. Marriages were defined as early in relation to sexuality and pregnancies. The delimitation of early in relation to sexuality and pregnancies was clearer. Early sexuality was defined as any sexual activity or desire outside marriage. Hence, pregnancies outside marriages were a big dishonour and therefore considered early. Also, when young women's bodies are not mature enough, pregnancies were seen as early because of the health related risks. The chapter has argued that these findings suggest that early marriage was not seen as a problem by itself. Rather, participants narratives mentioned both advantages and disadvantages of early marriages that appeared closely linked with early pregnancies: early marriages can prevent pre-marital pregnancies, but can lead to maternal mortality. To minimise the risks and keep the

<sup>85</sup>‘Family planning does not prevent sexually transmitted diseases’

advantages, the contraction of marriage is separated from the consummation of marriage. In this context, early marriage approaches were focused on early pregnancies and early sexuality, rather than marriages by 'itself'. However, the results presented suggest that while communities were starting to talk about sexuality, the approach was mainly preventive with a strong emphasis on abstinence, leading to sometimes contradictory messages around family planning.

## 7

### **MARRIAGE DECISIONS AND AGENCY STRATEGIES**

*'C'est nous qui vont décider, celui qui veut me marié et moi. Apres mes parents vont prendre la décision final'*

Married Young Woman



Picture 10: Group picture at the end of the Girls Camp

Having presented in the previous chapters the understandings of early marriage, in this section I explore what role young women and men play in the decisions on whether, when and who to marry in that context. To that end, I first describe how marriages are celebrated in rural Kolda and under which norms and rules. Then, I present who takes marriage decisions according to young women and men's views. Finally, in the last section I focus on how decisions are taken. By doing so, I highlight the nuances that show the different ways young women and men exercise agency around marriage decisions. Moreover, I triangulate young women and men's narratives around marriage decisions with the results of the database identifying all cases of young women and men under the age of 19 years old in rural Kolda who are already married.

## 7.1 CUSTOMARY MARRIAGES

All marriages in the rural communities in Kolda were customary, celebrated traditionally. The Imam conducted the unions at the mosque, and there was no registration at the city hall. The validity of customary marriages was unquestioned and relied on Islamic Law. The main marriage rules mentioned were two: men's right to marry up to four women, and the prohibition of any forced marriage.

The interviewed imams also emphasized that the Quran is clear stating that forced marriages are forbidden, adding that the Islam does not agree with 'child marriages'. However, the delimitation of when to marry in the Quran seemed to be more related to the interpretation of the transition from childhood to adulthood, rather than an explicit age boundary. Hence, as the following quote shows, an imam explained that there are two main reasons why imams marry young women and men that are or can be under the age of eighteen. First, because there is consent from both spouses, and second, because there are other factors in the situation that lead the imam and the parents to believe marriage is the best option. In the words of an Imam: *'Dans notre société, personne ne veut pas avoir fils qui sont pas nés dans le mariage. ... Si je suis l'Imam du quartier et tu m'emmènes ta fille pour la marier et elle est d'accord, si je dit non je ne peut pas faire le mariage par ce que elle est encore petite, deux mois après tu viens et tu me dis ma fille elle est enceinte. Après c'est ma responsabilité. Voilà pourquoi les imams ce peut pas opposer'*<sup>86</sup> (I.40, Imam). The quote highlights that Imams conduct marital unions despite the legal age because of the fear to early pregnancies.

Customary marriages obey traditional practices. Research participants explained that marriages require a negotiation between the two families, as the family of the young man has to pay a so-called 'dot' (bride price) to the family of the young lady. The 'dot' can be paid in different forms, for a value of around 100,000 CFA (152 Euros)<sup>87</sup>. The celebration of a marriage has three steps, first the engagement when the family agrees and pays the bride price, then the union at the mosque, and finally the marriage consummation. The engagement gives the young man the right to visit the young woman and have a closer communication. The marriage ceremony gives the status as 'married'. Consummation of marriage refers to when the wife moves to the husband's house and have the first sexual intercourse. The consummation can take place right after the ceremony but sometimes can also take place much later. Moreover, the Senegalese national marriage law, which states as the age to marry 16 for young women and 18 for young men, was generally unknown by young women and men as well as by parents. As an Imam emphasised: *'Nous on connais pas les papier de mariage...l'islam c'est pas basé sur l'âge, l'islam ce base sur la*

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<sup>86</sup> 'In our society, no one wants to have sons who are not born within a marriage. ... If I am the Imam of the neighborhood and you take me your daughter to marry her and she agrees, if I say no I cannot make the marriage because she is still young, two months after you come and you tell me my daughter she is pregnant. Then it is my responsibility. This is why imams can not oppose '

<sup>87</sup> 1 Euros= 655,95 CFA (on 30.05.2017)

*force, si le corps peut supporter le mariage*<sup>88</sup> (I.40, Imam). Thus, customary marriages are not registered and not based on age.

Divorces were rare, not encouraged, but not prohibited. Participants narratives suggested that when strong marriage problems arise, divorces are guided by both traditional practices as well as by Islam marriage rules. The two families have to negotiate again, as the family of the wife has to return the bride price and the wife moves back to her family's house. Imams can play an important role as mediators. In this quote, an imam details several rules that guide a divorce. Taking into account the rules on which marital unions were based, the following sub-section presents who takes the decision to marry according to young women and men's testimonies.

## 7.2 WHO TAKES THE DECISION TO MARRY?

When explaining who had decided or would decide when and who to marry, young women and men expressed that decisions relied mainly on themselves or on their parents. In this sub-section I detail both cases.

### 7.2.1. 'C'EST MOI QUI A DECIDÉ'

In most cases, young women and men, married and unmarried, expressed that marriage decisions and choices relied or will rely on them. These decisions and choices were described in two general ways. First, and the most common, as a joint decision in which young women and men discuss together and agree to marry. This seemed to be the increasing way to take marriage decisions. In some cases, young women and men knew each other from school or from the community. A young woman explained *'On a décidé nous deux de nous marier et après on a dit à la famille'*<sup>89</sup> (I. 28, married young woman). So, they knew each other, decided they wanted to marry, and then they consulted their families.

In other cases, young women and men did not know each other from before. Still, the young man approached the young woman and proposed her to marry. In these cases, both expressed they decided. Young men because they made the proposal and chose the person, and young women because they decided whether they agree or not. In the words of a young woman: *'C'est moi qui a choisi. Il est venu. Et j'étais d'accord. Je suis revenu pour parler avec ma mère et tout raconteur. Elle m'a dit est ce que tu l'aimes, et j'ai dit oui'*<sup>90</sup> (I.24, married young woman). With this quote, this young women emphasized that marrying was her choice because she accepted. Moreover, as the following quote shows, some young women explained having rejected a few proposals before accepting one:

*'J'étais impliqué par ce que avant de mon marie il y avait quelqu'un qui voulait me marier, qui avait demander ca mais j'ai refusé, par ce que je ne l'aimait pas. Mais mon marie, avant*

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<sup>88</sup> 'We do not know marriage papers ... Islam is not based on age, Islam based on strength, if the body can bear the marriage'

<sup>89</sup> 'The two of us decided to get married and then we told the family'

<sup>90</sup> 'I choose. He came. And I agreed. I came back to talk with my mother and tell her all. She asked me you love him, and I said yes '

*que il partez chez moi pour parler avec mes parents, on a discuté, et après il est allé à la maison*<sup>91</sup>(Interview 33, young woman, married).

These quotes confirm that in joint discussions young women considered expressing agreement or disagreement with marriage proposals a form of choosing and deciding. Second, also in cases when there was no joint discussion, young women and men expressed that the decisions relied on them. The following quote illustrates a case where a young man proposed marriage directly to the young woman's family without previously talking to her: *'C'est ma cousine, c'est moi qui a décidé de la marier. Dans sa famille ce son papa qui lui a donner en mariage'*<sup>92</sup>(I. 7, married young man). In cases like this, young men decided as they chose who to propose and some young women also expressed that it was their decision because their parents consulted them. In the words of a young woman: *'Beaucoup des personnes voulais me marier mais je ne voulais pas, et quand lui il est venue, mes parents m'ont donner en mariage et j 'ai dit oui, j'ai accepté'*<sup>93</sup>(I.20, married young woman). In this quote, a married young woman highlights that she agreed with one marriage proposal suggesting that the decision relied on her although the marriage proposal came via her parents. In all these cases, young women and men attributed the decision making power regarding marriage to themselves.

#### 7.2.2. 'C'EST MES PARENTS QUI DECIDENT'

The second most common answer among young women and men in relation to who takes marriage decisions was 'my parents'. Parents, particularly fathers, taking marriage decisions for young women and men was also common. The fathers' decision making on marriage seemed to be based on power gender relations (being the oldest male in the family), as well as on symbolic gender relations, as illustrated in the quote of a young man that argued that *the Peul* do not choose: *'Non non, nous les Peul on ne choisissons pas. C'est ma famille. C'est ton père qui va aller chercher. Tu vois, ils vont te dire toi tu fais ça, il n'y a pas des autres explications'*<sup>94</sup>(I.21, married young man). On that view, tradition appeared as the reason why families, particularly fathers, take marriage decisions.

In some cases, the decisions on who to marry relied on the parents while when to marry depended on young women and men. This form of taking marriage decisions appeared among both married and unmarried young women and men. In the words of a young woman: *'Après mes études, Je dirais à mes parents que je voudrais me marié, et à eux la décision'*<sup>95</sup>(I.3, unmarried young woman). So, some unmarried young women and men argued that they will tell their parents when they are 'ready' and ask them to find a husband/wife for them. Moreover, although young women and men sometimes referred to 'their parents', more detailed answers

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<sup>91</sup> I was involved because before my husband there was someone who wanted to marry me, who had asked for it but I refused, because I did not like him. But my husband, before he went to talk with my parents, we talked, and then he went to my house'

<sup>92</sup> She's my cousin, it's me who decided to marry her. In her family her dad gave her in marriage'

<sup>93</sup> Many people wanted to marry me but I did not want, and when he came, my parents gave me in marriage and I said yes, I have to accept

<sup>94</sup> 'No no, we Peul we do not choose. It is my family. We do not choose. It's your father who goes to find one. You see, they will tell you to do this, there's no explanation, there's no other explanation'

<sup>95</sup> After my studies, I will tell my parents that I want to marry, and to them the decision'

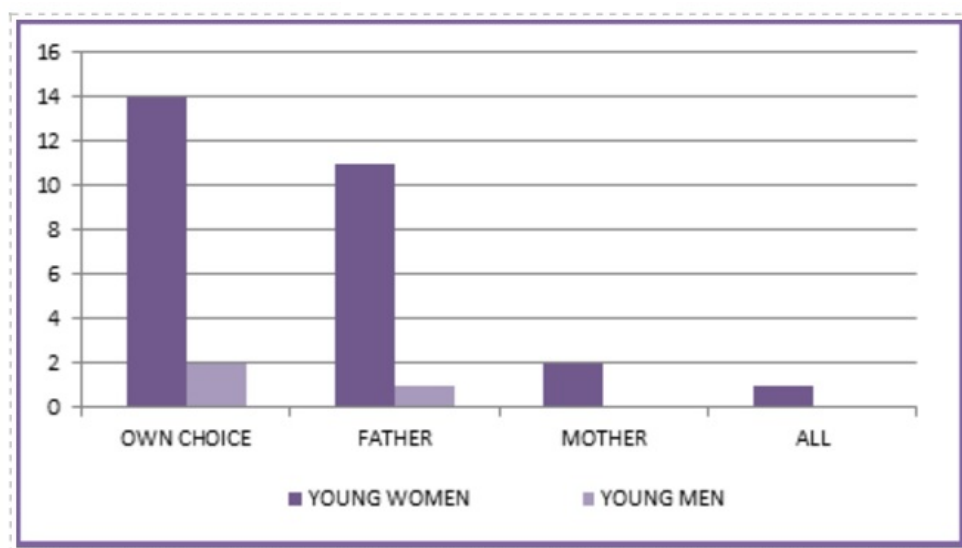
suggested that fathers were usually the ones with stronger decision making power. In these cases, the decision-making power relied on the fathers but young women and men exercised non-decision making power by influencing when they wanted to marry.

### 7.2.3 TRIANGULATION WITH THE DATABASE: WHOSE CHOICE?

The database developed by ENDA JA identified all young women and men under the age of 19 who were already married. One of the questions they were asked was whose choice it was to marry. Figure 10 shows the given responses. From the 31 cases, 16 stated that marrying had been their own choice and one answered a joint decision together with their parents. These results are in line with interviewees attributing decision making power around marriage on themselves. The second most common answer was also 'my father' (12 cases).

Summing up, these results support the argument that not all young women are passive victims, and that all the experiences are not homogenous (Mohanty, 1991; Bunting, 2005; Archambault, 2011; Karisa, 2016). Young women and men take decisions around marriage when they are under and above 18 years old. Fathers also take marriage decisions, for both their daughters and their sons. In both cases, there were important nuances in how the decisions are taken. The next section looks beyond the attribution of the decision-making power, to see what are young women and men's agency strategies in both situations, when they decide and when their parents do.

Figure 9: Whose Choice?



*Source: Based on ENDA JA Database*

## 7.3 HOW ARE DECISIONS TAKEN? AGENCY STRATEGIES

Although the answers on who takes marriage decisions seem quite clear (either young women and young men themselves or their parents), when exploring how decisions are taken several nuances appeared. In this sub-section, I detail these nuances to uncover young women and men's agency strategies around the decisions on whether, when and who to marry.



Young women and men's narratives suggested three main agency strategies: accommodation, negotiation, and resistance. These agency strategies appeared strongly related to the understandings around marriage, family (formation) and sexuality described in the previous section, evidencing as Ahearn (2001) states, that agency is socio-culturally-mediated. Ahearn's (2001) definition of agency aimed to facilitate the identification of new forms of agency. In that line, as accommodation, negotiation and resistance appeared both interlinked and also together, by detailing these forms of agency I also name new and more specific agency types.

### 7.3.1 'JE VAIS RESPECTER LEUR DÉCISION'<sup>96</sup>: ACCOMMODATIVE DECISIONS

Parent's opinions and decisions around marriage were very important for all young women and men, also for the ones that stated that the decision making relied on them. Hence, accommodation was the most common strategy, as in any case young women and men would not take a decision contrary to their parent's will. As a young woman affirmed: *'Je vais respecter leur décision, par ce que si non je vais regretter dans l'avenir de ne pas respecter'*<sup>97</sup> (I. 5, unmarried young woman). The quote highlights the preference for respecting parents decisions.

Accommodation is often framed as the opposite of resistance, referring to a form of passive adaptation to social constraints. However, young women and men's accommodation to their parents' preferences did not suggest a lack of agency, but rather a particular form of exercising agency. Young women and men's narratives confirm Fraser's (1992) argument that agency can encompass both the power of social constraints as well as the power to act against them.

Some unmarried young women and men convincingly affirmed that they are the ones to decide when and who to marry, but when asked about their position in case of their parent's disagreement, they answered that they would give up without insisting. This position appeared both among young women: *'C'est moi qui decide. Je vais en parler avec mon papa si ils sont d'accord de que je me marie, si non, je laisse tombé'*<sup>98</sup> (I.9, unmarried young woman), as well as among young men, *'La si le papa il ne veut pas, le meilleur c'est d'arrêter, par ce que c'est le papa qui va demander la main de la jeune fille'*<sup>99</sup> (I.12, unmarried young man). These quotes illustrate that participants taking their marriage decisions, would not make a choice with which their parents, and particularly fathers, do not agree.

The narratives about cases in which parent's had opposed a marriage choice, were related to the norm that young women and men were not supposed to marry their 'copin(e) d'enfance', even if young women got pregnant. The following quote is an example: *'Quand on a eu un enfant, on voulait nous marrie. Quand j'ai dit à mes parents d'aller voir si c'est possible que on se marie, on a dit que on l'a déjà marié'*<sup>100</sup> (I.11, unmarried young man). In other words, despite the pregnancy

<sup>96</sup> 'I will respect their decision'

<sup>97</sup> 'I will respect their decision, otherwise I will regret in the future not having respected '

<sup>98</sup> 'It's me who decides. I will talk with my parents if they agree that I get married, if not, I will drop'

<sup>99</sup> 'If my dad does not want to, the best thing is to stop, because my dad is going to ask the hand of the young women '

<sup>100</sup> 'When we had a child, we wanted to marry. When I told my parents to go and see if it was possible to marry her, we were told that she had already given to marry'

and the will to marry, the couple could not marry as the family of the young woman preferred another marriage.

Other young women and men seemed to not feel as passive victims when parents take marriage decisions. Rather, these young women and men argued that they leave the decisions to them, that they want to respect their parents' choices, or that they do not have specific preferences and when parents inform them, they honestly agree. For example, a married young woman explained that her marriage was their parent's decision but that she agreed because she already wanted to marry as she had left school five years before the marriage proposal. In her own words : *'Ce sont mes parents qui m'ont dit de marier, mais je voulais me marier par ce que j'avais rester 5 ans sans marie depuis d'avoir laissé l'école'*<sup>101</sup> (I.20, married young woman).

Also, some young women and men expressed that they would unconditionally accept their parents' proposals. A young man stated: *'Je laisse la décision a mes parents, n'importe quelle personne qui me propose, je vais me marier avec elle. Que elle soit belle ou non, je vais me marier avec elle'*<sup>102</sup> (I.6, unmarried young man), and a young woman affirmed, *'Même si c'est un fou si ils me dit de me marier avec lui, je vais me marier avec lui'*<sup>103</sup> (I.5, unmarried young woman). The acceptance of parents decisions, in these quotes, is unquestioned.

The inclination for accommodation was explained along two main lines. On one hand, the importance of the respect for elders, mainly expressed in a form of gratitude: *'Je ne vais pas force par ce que c'est mes parents qui mon vu naitre et grandir'*<sup>104</sup> (I. 15, unmarried young woman). This respect was also related to a more rational analysis that parent's want and know the best for young women and men, illustrated in the following quote: *'Eux ils savent le meilleur pour moi, donc si ils me dissent de marier un personne je vais aller me marrie'*<sup>105</sup>. (I.5, unmarried young woman). These quotes show the relation between accommodation and trust/gratitude in parents.

On the other hand, accommodation also appeared directly related to the functionality of marriage and family. Particularly young women expressed the importance of continued support of their parents in case marriage problems would emerge. Parents could then ask for the divorce, pay back the bride price and welcome young women back home. A married young woman who could not marry the father of her first child because of her father's opposition explained:

*'Le mariage est quelque chose inconnue, dans l'avenir tu ne sais pas qu'est-ce que se va produire. Donc que si je conteste la proposition de mon papa et je me marie avec le père de mon fils que mon papa ne veut pas, si demain il y a des problèmes, mon papa dira je t'avait*

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<sup>101</sup> 'It was my parents who told me to marry, but I wanted to get married because I had been 5 years unmarried since I left school '

<sup>102</sup> 'I leave the decision to my parents, anyone who they me, I will marry her. Whether beautiful or not, I'll marry her '

<sup>103</sup> 'Even if it's a mad man, if they tell me to marry him, I'll marry him '

<sup>104</sup> 'Even if it's a madman if they tell me to marry him, I'll marry him' 'I will not force by what it is my parents who saw me born and grow'

<sup>105</sup> 'They know the best for me, so if they dissent me to marry a person I will go marry me'

*prévenue. Si je respecte la proposition de mon papa , si jamais quelque chose m'arrive, que je ne le souhaite pas, je pourrais me rendre directement ou appeler à mon papa pour lui dire voilà ce que est arrivé, et il pourrait au moins m'aider'*<sup>106</sup>(I.29, married young woman)

This quote shows the importance for young women to not lose their families' support. Young men also expressed the functionality of accommodation but more related to the importance of a good relationship between their mothers and wives, as they will have to live and work together. A young man argued that he would not marry a young woman if his mother does not agree because that would bring conflict. In his words: *'la maman fera tout pour que la fille part, fera tout par ce que elle n'aime pas la fille donc que elle ne vas pas la donner de la paix a la fille. La fille ne serait pas en paix et elle va se fatiguer et elle va demander le divorce'*<sup>107</sup> (I.12, unmarried young man). All these findings show that young women and men can decide and accommodate at the same time, in what I propose could be named 'accommodative decisions'.

### 7.3.2 FORMS OF RESISTANCE

In rural communities in Kolda the ties are strong, and community members tend to all know each other, so any kind of conflict within the family or community is preferably avoided. Young women and men would not oppose their parents' decisions. A young man explained: *'Je suis pas éduquer pour que je refuse, on nous éduque pas ça, que on te dit quelque chose et tu dis non, non non, on éduque pas ça ici'*<sup>108</sup> (I. 21, married young man). Opposition is, thus, not considered. Still, several forms of resistance were found.

Several young women did not agree with their parents' marriage decisions. Although they ended up marrying and listening to their parents' choices, these young women described reactions that showed forms of resistance. In various cases, young women went to their parents and expressed their disagreement with the marriage decisions and the reasons. As an example, the following quote is from a young woman that told her father she did not want to marry to be able to continue her studies. In her words: *'J'ai dit à mon papa que je voulais continuer mes études que je ne voulais pas me marier'*<sup>109</sup> (I.10, married young woman).

Others canalized the disagreement through mothers, teachers and particularly siblings: *'J'en ai parler avec ma mère, mais elle a dit que elle ne pouvait rien faire'*<sup>110</sup> (I.34, married young woman). Both brothers and sisters appeared as the people through whom often young women tried to resist their fathers' marriage decisions. Siblings were sometimes successful in preventing their younger sister's marriages, as the case of an unmarried young man that convinced his father to not marry his younger sister. In his words: *'J'ai montrer a mon père les*

<sup>106</sup>Marriage is something unknown, in the future you do not know what will happen. So if I challenge my father's proposal and I marry my son's father that my dad does not want, if tomorrow there are problems, my dad will say I warned you. If I respect my father's proposal, if something ever happens to me, that I do not wish, I could go directly or call my dad to tell him that's what happened, and he could at least help me'

<sup>107</sup>The mother will do everything for the girl to leave, will do everything because she does not like the girl so she won't give her peace. The girl would not be in peace, she will get tired and she will ask for a divorce '

<sup>108</sup>I am not educated to refuse, we are not educated for that, that we are told something and you say no, no no, we do not teach this here'

<sup>109</sup>I told my dad I wanted to continue my studies that I did not want to marry'

<sup>110</sup>I talked about it with my mother, but she said she could do anything'

*conséquences et depuis il a arrêté*<sup>111</sup> (I.10, unmarried young man). Other times, siblings helped to postpone the marriage consummation. For example, a young woman explained: *J'en avait parler avec mon grand frère et il est partir dire a mes parents de me laisser étudier au lieu de me donner en mariage*<sup>112</sup> (I.8, married young woman). The quote indicates that through her brother, this young woman managed to continue with her studies.

Moreover, other young women even showed more direct forms of resistance. For example, one young woman expressed that she stopped eating for several days to express her disagreement: *J'ai reste 3 jours sans manger, j'ai pleurer, mais ils m'ont donner en mariage*<sup>113</sup> (I.34, married young woman). This quote shows a clear form of resistance, even though in this case it did not lead to the desired results.

These forms of agency suit the idea of accommodative protest described by MacLeod (1992). Moreover, these results are in line with the critics of agency as an equation of resistance, particularly that opposition is only one form of resistance and that there no pure resistance (Ortner, 1995; Ahearn 2001)).

### 7.3.3 NEGOTIATION

In this context – that is, where young women and men want their parents' approval and where forms of resistance have a limited impact --participants narratives suggested that a common form of exercising agency, particularly among young women, was negotiation. Negotiation was evident along two main situations.

When young women received a marriage proposal from a young man, conditions and requirements were brought into discussion. Young men described that in the proposal discussion, young women often highlighted that their needs should be covered and that the young man should behave properly: *Quand j'ai proposé elle a dit ce qui me plait, ce que je veux, quand tu m'amène chez toi, tu ne peut pas t'amuser, tu vas me gérer*<sup>114</sup>. (I.39, married young man). This quote clearly shows gendered expectations in marriage. Also, as the following quote shows, time appeared as another variable that young women negotiated in proposal discussions: *En premier lieu, on a discuter, et il ma demander est ce que tu veut te marier, et j'ai dit oui mais je suis trop jeune, j'ai 16 ans, je peut pas me marier, donc que il m'a donner 3 ans et bon, alors il est revenue et on a célébrer*<sup>115</sup> (I.32, married young woman). The quote shows that the young woman agreed only after negotiating when to marry.

Young women also exercised agency in form of negotiation when a marriage proposal came via their parents. This negotiation was done directly with parents, or sometimes through older brothers as a way to convince their parents. In negotiation, there was sometimes

<sup>111</sup> I have shown my father the consequences and since he stopped'

<sup>112</sup> I spoke with my older brother and he told my parents to let me study instead of giving me in marriage'

<sup>113</sup> 'I stayed 3 days without eating, I cry, but they gave me in marriage '

<sup>114</sup> 'When I proposed her marriage, she said what I want, when you take me to your house, you cannot have fun, you will have to manage me '

<sup>115</sup> In the first place, we discussed, and he asked do you want to get married, and I said yes, but I'm too young, I'm 16, I can not get married, so he gave me 3 years and well, then he came back and we celebrated '

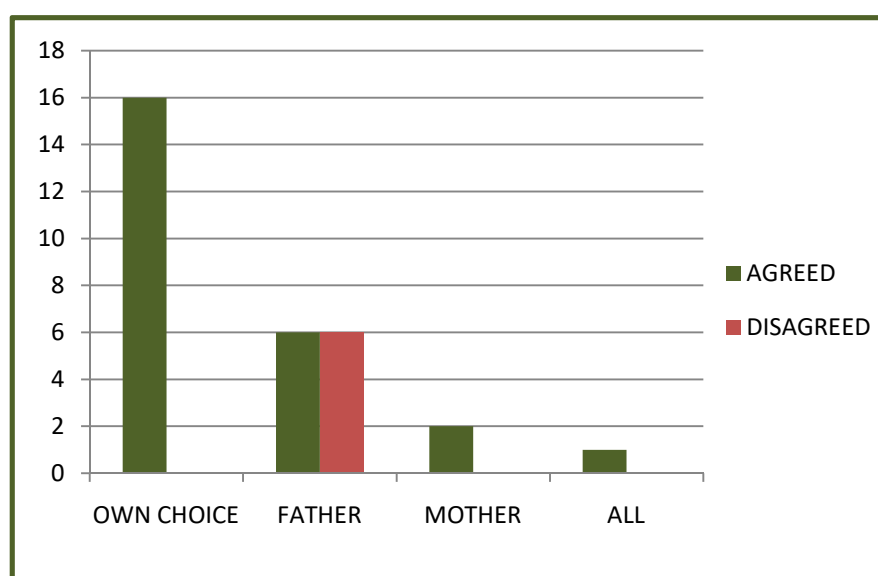
anopportunistic agency in the sense of young women who, for example, explained that marrying allowed them to continue their studies because the husband could cover the education costs more easily than their parents. Referring to his sister, a young man explained: *'Ils ont discuter jusqu'au tomber d'accord. Elle a demander si elle peut étudier, il a dit oui je peut te laisser apprendre, et je peut t'accompagner et je peut t'aider avec tes études, elle était d'accord et ils ont signé'*<sup>116</sup> (I.13, unmarried young man).

These cases indicate that when young women received a marriage proposal directly from a young man or through her parents, they would at times raise their conditions before agreeing. Moreover, negotiation agency appeared related to the notion of judicious opportunism, as young women sometimes agreed to marry based on a rational analysis to take advantage of the opportunities that emerged. A husband that supports his wife's studies was identified as an opportunity.

#### 7.3.4 TRIANGULATION

The analysis of the database of married young women and men in the ten communities also showcases the accommodation strategy. Young women and men were asked not only who took the marriage decisions, but also if they agreed with these decisions. By relating the variables choice and agreement, results show that when parents choose and decide, not always young women did automatically disagree. Figure 12 shows that from the 12 cases where the fathers took the marriage decisions, 6 young women and men disagreed and six agreed. Hence, the data goes in line with the interview findings that young women and men take accommodative decisions and can also express forms of resistance.

Figure 10: Relation choice and agreement among young married women and men

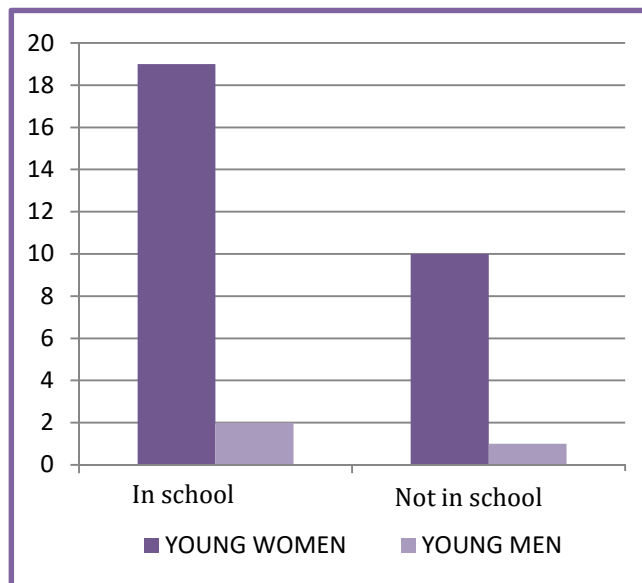


Source: Base on ENDA IA Data Base

<sup>116</sup> 'They discussed until they agreed. She asked if she could study, he said yes I can let you learn, and I can accompany you and I can help you with your studies, she agreed and they signed '

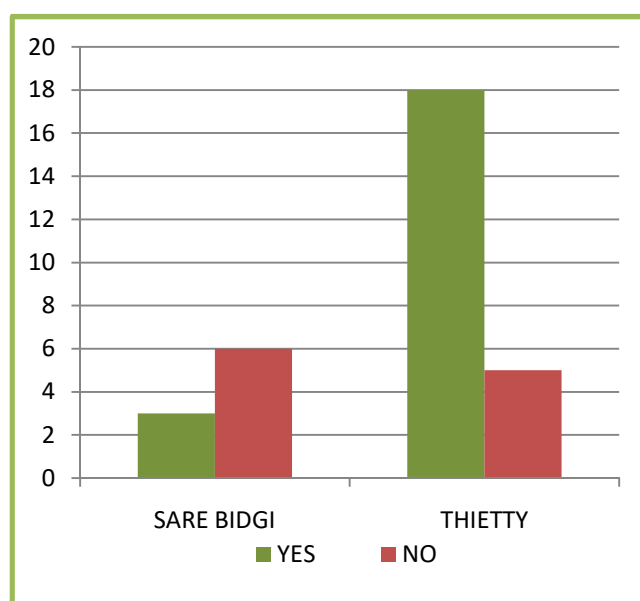
Moreover, in line with the finding that emerged from the qualitative data as to how young women often exercised their agency by asking to continue their studies if they marry, the quantitative data confirms this result. By relating the variables marriage status and school status, results show that most married young women and men are still studying (Figure 12). When adding the variable location, data even shows that the school attendance of married young women and men is higher in the more rural region of Thietty (Figure 13).

**Figure 11: School status of young women and men under 19 years old married**



*Source: Based on ENDA JA Database*

**Figure 12: School status of young women and men under 19 years old by commune**



*Source: Based on END JA Database*

Altogether, all these findings show that young women and men are exercising agency around marriage decisions, although the options seemed to be limited by parents preferences and social norms. Hence Klocker's (2007) concept of thin agency is more suitable than denying agency evidences. Moreover, these results confirm that different types of agency exist (Ahearn, 2001; Klocker, 2007; Murphy-Graham & Leal, 2015). Also, these results show but that agency variations can appear simultaneously because the motivations behind human actions are multiple and complex. (MacLeod, 1992; Murphy-Graham & Leal, 2015). More specifically, young women and men's forms of exercising agency in marriage decisions did show at the same time negotiation, accommodation and forms of resistance.

## **7.4 CONCLUSIONS**

In this chapter, I have described the rules and norms that guide how marriages are contracted and celebrated in rural Kolda, and the findings around young women and men's agency strategies in marriage decisions. All marriages were customary, celebrated traditionally under the Islamic law with no registration at the city hall. The payment of a bride price appeared as a central requirement to conduct a marital union. According to married and unmarried young women and men, marriage decisions rely on themselves or sometimes on their parents. Whether the decisions relied on young women and men self, or on their parents, the approval of the parents was always valued. In no case would young women or men oppose their parents' preferences, because of the importance of respecting elders, and because of the functionality of the family. The exploration of how decisions are taken showed that not only young women and men are not passive victims, but that the forms of exercising agency are various and could appear simultaneously. Accommodation, negotiation, and forms of resistance and negotiation were the most common agency strategies among young women and men in relation to marriage decisions.

## 8

### **DISCUSSION: AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER RELATIONS**

*'Gender arrangements often appear unchanging but are, in fact, always changing'*

Connell, 2002



Picture 11: Taken during an activity organised by the youth platform Parole aux Jeunes of young women and men promoting the Ligne Gindima, a free line that provides SRHR information

Gender inequalities have been identified as the root driver of early marriages by scholars and practitioners. However, gender did not appear as a variable of analysis among young women and men, neither within the broader community narratives. Still, young women and men's understandings and preferences around marriage and family (formation), as well as the forms of agency that are being exercised presented in the empirical chapters, indicate a strong influence of gender structures. Moreover, gender relations appeared as central to understand the practice of early marriage in rural Kolda as well as young women and men's agency strategies. Hence, the discussion focuses on the inferred findings of gender relations. The discussion starts by describing the main gender arrangements in the families and communities. Then, I highlight changes in these relations and I reflect on the implications of these changes. Finally, I present the theoretical model presented in the theoretical framework adapted by including the centrality of gender relations.



## **8.1 EXPLORING VIEWS ON FAMILY AND MARRIAGE: THE NEEDED LENS TO IDENTIFY AGENCY STRATEGIES**

The findings presented in the empirical chapters show that young women and men's agency strategies were strongly related with local understandings around family, marriage and sexuality. In line with the relativist approach presented in the theoretical chapter, the detailed findings confirm that contextualization was necessary to identify forms of agency. Therefore, the structure of the empirical chapters followed the direction drawn in the conceptual model by first detailing the understandings and preferences around family, marriage and sexuality before presenting forms of agency strategies.

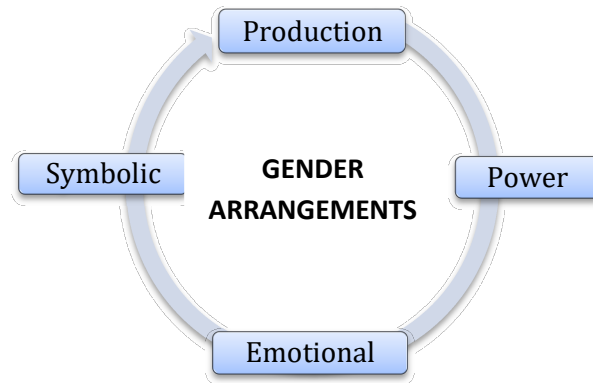
In relation to young women and men's views on family and marriage, I highlight two main findings. On the one hand, young women and men's explicit explanations around the importance of family and marriage indicated a functionalist view of both. The functions highlighted were in line with the ones identified by functionalists theories: reproductive, economic and educational (Murdock, 1949; Parson, 1951). Besides, young women and men's narratives also mentioned additional functions, such as companionship, that are not present in functionalist theories. This difference seems to be related to a different conceptualization of socialisation. Unlike with nuclear families in which functionalist theories are based, socialisation in rural Kolda occurs within the large and extended families. Still, young women and men's explicit narratives around family and marriage resonate with Murdock's (1949) argument that families perform basic functions in societies that benefit both society and the individual.

On the other hand, the functions of family and marriage were based on strong gender arrangements although gender did not appear as a variable of analysis in young women and men's narratives around family and marriage. The non-consideration of gender inequalities within family structures is precisely the main critic that feminist scholars have made to functionalist theories (Andersen, 2005). Therefore, while presenting young women and men's functionalist views of family and marriage, the empirical chapters have highlighted the influence of gender relations in young women and men's narratives. Thus, summing up, young women and men's agency strategies around marriage decisions were influenced by a very functional understanding of family and marriage which, in turn, appeared to be based on strong gender arrangements.

### **8.1.1 LONG ESTABLISHED GENDER ARRANGEMENTS IN RURAL KOLDA**

The un-naming of gender can be explained along Connell's argument that gender arrangements can become so common and familiar that are seen as natural (Connell, 2002). Community narratives, including young women and young men's, suggested long-established gender arrangements in all of the four dimensions of Connell's gender relations model. As figure 15 shows, the four dimensions are strongly interlinked and the separation is only an analysis tool (Connell, 2002).

Figure 13: Four dimensions to analyse gender relations



The production dimension of gender relations in rural Kolda is based on the gendered division of labour: men work in the field and women are responsible for the domestic and care work. This division means that men have access to monetary income, although limited for the nature of the economic activities in the communities, and women have no income. Hence, the relations between women and men are based on the need of each other for specific functions. While for both young women and men marriage is a must to form a family (reproductive function), for young women marriage is also a mode of livelihood (the husband covers her basic needs) and for young men it is a source of domestic and care work (the wife helps the husband's mother carrying with the domestic workload). Consequently, the relation school-marriage for young women is direct (no in between options), while for young men it is not. Before marrying, young men need to generate enough income to 'afford' a wife.

Besides the categorical differences that result from the gendered division of labour, the relations between young women and men appeared determined by this production dimension. It is always the young man that has to propose marriage to a young woman. The family of the young men pays a bride price to the family of the young women. Hence after marriage women depend on their husbands and that makes that for everything they need to count with their 'husbands permission'. In other words, production dimensions create power differences within a married couple that determines the pre-marital and marital relationship, as well as the relations between married and unmarried young women and men with their respective families.

Two variables appeared as determinants of the power dimension of gender relations: gender and age. These two variables determine the different forms of power among the members of the family. In all families, the decision making power relies on the oldest male member, the father or the eldest brother. The oldest siblings showed having non-decision making power, that is influencing which topics need to be addressed within the family. Therefore, young women sometimes canalised forms of resistance and negotiation strategies regarding marriage decision through their oldest brother or sister. Moreover, both parents had an ideological power evidenced in the form of unquestioned respect for elders among all young women and men.

The production and power dimensions, thus age and gender as power axes and the gender division of labour, have a direct influence on the emotional ties and relationships within families

and communities. Therefore, the more distance in age and gender between family members, the poorer the communication and trust ties between them. Hence, the relationships between fathers and the youngest daughters are the most distant, while there are very strong emotional ties between siblings, particularly older brothers, in terms of communication, support and trust.

The symbolic dimension of gender relation appeared closely linked to social and sexual community norms. The main symbolisms influencing gender relations were clothing, virginity, and mobile phones, particularly in relation to young women. The meanings attributed to this symbols define how young women should behave in relation to young men. Young women's virginity until marriage is seen as central to have a relationship based on respect. Unmarried young women's clothing should be correct to not provoke young men and to give a good image that allows them to get a marriage proposal. Married women have to start wearing the more traditional clothes to show their married status and behave as a proper wife.

## **8.2 CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS AND AGENCY STRATEGIES**

Gender arrangements can be strong, naturalised and very familiar, as in the case of rural Kolda. Therefore, as Connell (2002) argues, gender arrangements often appear unchanging. However, Connell emphasises that in fact 'gender arrangements are always changing, as human practice creates new situations and as structures develop crisis tendencies'(2002: 10). Participants accounts suggested changes in gender relations along Connell's four dimensions.

In relation the to the production dimension, there was an increased support that young women receive to continue their studies. Some mentioned desires to go to university. Even in community debates, older women and men referred to the current possibility in the world that women can aspire to be president or ministers, showing high expectations of what young women can achieve. The joint discussions between young women and men to take marriage decisions also illustrate a change in gender relations, in this case, more linked with the power dimension. Community narratives indicated that young women and men discussing together whether they want to marry is an increasing tendency, attributed to the new generation. While these changes were not expressed as a concern, changes in intimate and social relationships between young women and men, more related to the emotional and symbolic dimensions of gender relations, were expressed as a strong concern.

Having teenage girlfriends and boyfriends was not uncommon among young women and men, and was seen as inadmissible within communities. Community narratives around early pregnancies and early sexuality not only indicated that these issues were a new concern. The high number of teenage pregnancies was the clearest proof that young women and men are sexually active despite their unmarried status. As presented in the findings, older women and men, tended to attribute these new concerns to external causes such as the decline of female circumcision, the incitation by technology, or modern food. However, young women and men's narratives suggested that these changes are related to the building of closer relations, which seemed to be influenced by several factors such as more time spent together as they study at school, new referents, more contact with urban areas, the influence of modernity or technology.

Based on this findings, I argue that the described changes in the relationships between young women and men confront long-established gender arrangements that, particularly in relation to the emotional and symbolic dimensions of gender relations, create strong tensions. These tensions are the core of the concerns around early sexuality and early pregnancies, and therefore central to the practice of early marriage. As parents know that their young daughters might be sexually active, instead of allowing these new forms of intimate relations they try to avoid it through marriage. Early pregnancies are a source of concern because young women and men do not have enough sexual education and access to contraception methods. While the community is aware of the sexual activity of young women and men, the preference is to keep promoting abstinence to maintain sexual norms and gender arrangements.

In other words, I aim to highlight that the core of early marriage is not only gender inequalities as a structural factor but rather the interplay between changes in gender relations and long-established gender arrangements. Thus, the core of early marriages are the tensions that might arise from the changing aspect of gender arrangements highlighted by Connell (2002). Therefore, young women and men's agency strategies around marriage decisions also need to be understood from this interplay. The forms of agency found among young women and men – accommodative decisions, negotiation and forms of resistance- suggest the young women and men are at the same time challenging long-established gender arrangements as well as adapting to these arrangements. Hence, young women and men's forms of exercising agency were various and simultaneous.

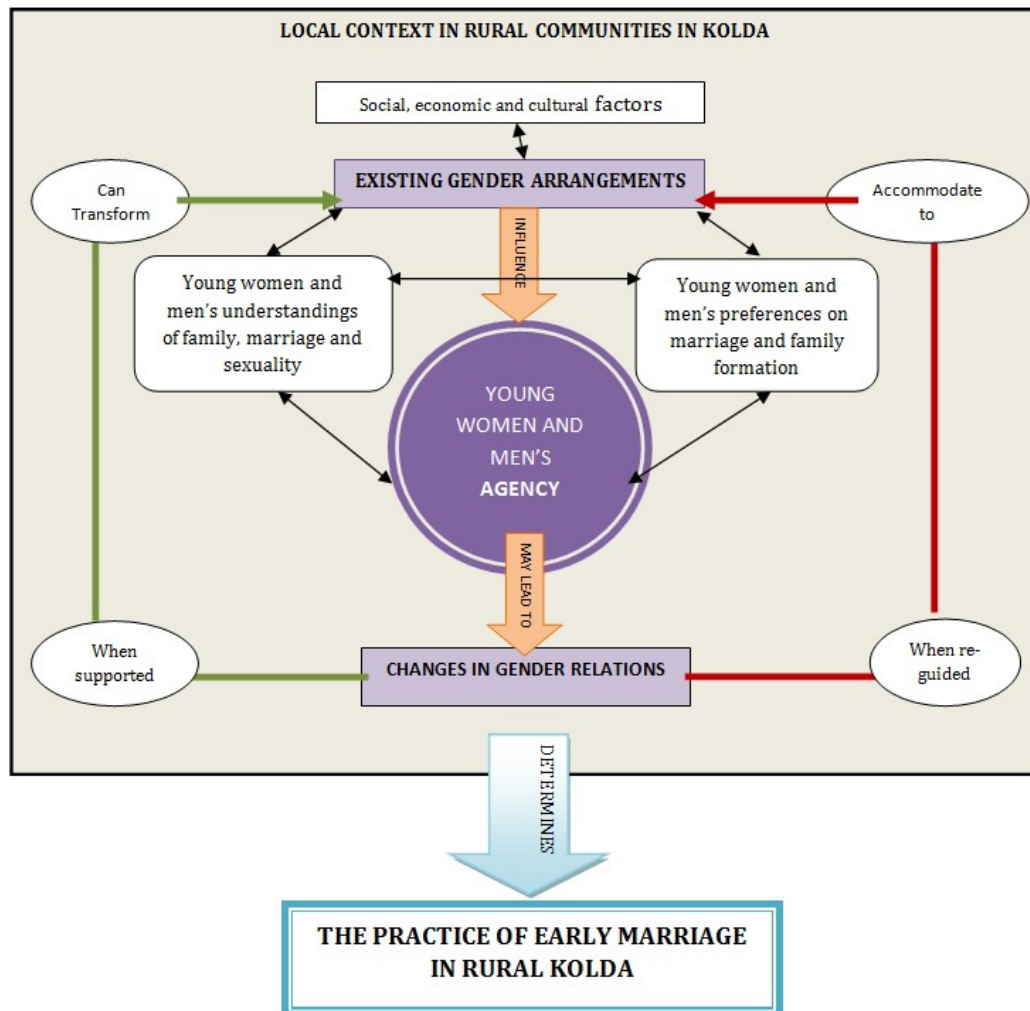
The question that would emerge is to what extent the changes in intimate and social relations have a transformative potential. Can these changes in relations between young women and men represent a strong change in gender arrangements, or will these changes be undermined and re-guided to not create a transformation? This would be a question to explore in further research, through longitudinal studies. Still, gender relations is also a question to take into account now, particularly because whether changes in relations between women and men are supported or not will have a direct implication on the degree of transformation in the broader gender arrangements.

### **8.3 ADAPTED CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

Figure 16 visualised the adapted conceptual model presented in the theoretical framework in line with the findings and discussion presented. As the findings of the study were in line with the relativist approach taken for the study, the main direction line of the scheme remains the same. Thus, the local context influences young women and men's understandings and preferences around family (formation), marriage and sexuality, which in turn influence young women and men's agency strategies. The scheme highlights this direction as the direction to understand and analyse the practice of early marriage. The main adaptation is that instead of only including gender inequalities as a structural dimension, the scheme visualised the interplay between long-established gender arrangements and changes in gender relations. Moreover, the scheme highlights that these interactions are not fixed or one may but rather open and

changing. This 'process/changing' factor is visualised with the red and green arrows to indicate that emerging changes in gender relations may or may not transform long-established gender arrangements.

Figure 14: Adapted Conceptual Model



## 9

### CONCLUSIONS



Picture 12: Young women and one man talking about early marriage in house-to-house visits in rural communities

In this final chapter, I present the conclusions of the study. To that end, I briefly synthesise the answer to the main research question. Moreover, theoretical reflections on the debate universalism-relativism are provided as well as five reflections in the form of recommendations for policy and practice.

## 9.1. ANSWERS TO THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

*What are the views of young rural women and men in Kolda, Senegal on marriage, family (formation) and sexuality, and how do they exercise agency in relation to decisions about whether, when and who to marry?*

The study shows that young women and men in rural Kolda have a functional view of family, marriage and sexuality. The family represents the main network of economic and social ties, as a source of both support and obligations. For young women, marriage is a mode of livelihood and for young men, it is a source of domestic and care work. For both young women and men, marriage is the union that allows the formation of a family. Sexuality has mainly a reproductive function, family formation is seen as natural and unquestioned desire and marriage as a positive obligation. Hence, all young women and men want to marry and have children. All these understandings are based on long-established gender arrangements that are so common that they are seen as natural and therefore not mentioned.

Within this context, young women and men are not passive victims but are exercising different forms of agency. On one hand, there are signs that young women and men are changing their relationships, having teenage boyfriends and girlfriends, and much closer friendships and communications. On the other hand, these changes create tensions as they confront long-established gender arrangements. Young women and men's forms of exercising agency show an interplay between these two elements: changing gender relations while avoiding strong confrontations. In turn, avoiding confrontations is linked to the functional view of marriage and family. Accommodative-decisions is the main form of agency among young women and men. Negotiation is particularly noticeable among young women, specifically in relation to their education. Moreover, young women and men's agency around marriage decisions can be at the same time accommodative-decision, negotiation with forms of resistance.

## 9.2 THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The universalism versus relativism debate is an epistemic debate. Therefore, the entire study has kept a more relativist position in line with the constructivist ontology. At the same time, the debate was presented at the beginning of the study as a theoretical framework to guide the reflections towards whether a human rights approach is suitable in addressing and studying the practice of early marriage. I argue that in the case of the study and practice on early marriage in rural Kolda the limitations of the human rights approach as defended by cultural relativists are not the underlying assumption of the universality of basic rights, but the limitation relied on a narrow interpretation of when these rights are violated. I base this argument on two reflections/findings:

First, the evidence that concepts such as age and childhood are socially constructed. Age was not a relevant variable of reference in rural Kolda. Young women and men sometimes did not know their exact age, and they rarely knew the ages of their relatives. Age was not a variable of reference in guiding the life course of young women and men. When to marry, when to study, when to work, when to get pregnant, when a person becomes an adult it not delimited by age.

That explains why marriages under 18 years are not seen as wrong by definition. Community narratives used the term 'marriage précoce' (early marriage) rather than 'marriage d'enfants' (child marriage). That is because the definition of a child is not the person under the age of 18.

Second, community narratives embraced notions of human rights. Although the term 'rights' was difficult to translate to the local language, the underlying meaning of the right to health, right to education, the right to life's free of violence, or even the right to consent to marriage appeared as very important to the communities involved in the study. Moreover, community concerns around the practice of early marriage, and their involvement in projects addressing early marriage is linked to the concern on health, education, and consent. This evidences that notions of human rights were very useful for community populations in rural Kolda.

The problem or limitations rely on, I argue, the interpretation of when these rights are violated. This is in line with Donnelly's (1984) defence of a weak cultural relativist position at the interpretation level. The author argues that Human Rights Declarations allow viewing human rights as *prima facie* but recognising culture as a limited source of interpretations. Without deepening into whether the international frameworks allow for this interpretations, I argue that in the case of approaches to address early marriage, the limitation of the human rights approach, at least in the case of rural Kolda, is the centrality of the variable age as the reference to determine when certain rights are violated.

In other words, human rights notions are relevant and useful in addressing the practice early marriage, but the indicators used cannot be variables that are irrelevant for the populations where early marriage is being addressed, in this case, age. In a context where age does not guide notions of childhood either preferences on when to marry, an age boundary determining what are 'early' and therefore 'harmful' marriage is risks to obscure the agency of those under the age boundary and deny attention to those above that age boundary. Summing up, I argue that the limitation of the human rights approach to early marriage does not rely on the assumption that certain rights are universal. Rather, the limitation relies on the use of age as the interpretation of when these rights are violated.

### **9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE**

In this study, I argue that young women and men are not passive victims of marriage decisions. However, by arguing that young women and men are exercising forms of agency around whether, when and who to marry I am not advocating for a de-problematization of the practice of early marriage. Rather, I am advocating for more nuanced situational analysis that captures all the complexities and allows for addressing more effectively and the specific issues that are limiting young women and men's options and opportunities.

For policy and practice, I present five reflections in the form of recommendations.

1. Policies and interventions should take into account that age is not always a variable of reference among communities where early marriage is practised. Hence, a too strong focus



on the 18 years old boundary can have two main consequences: first, the victimisation of some young women and men and the denial of their agency and preferences, and second, the lack of protection/attention to other young women and men older than 18. Moreover, the focus on the 18 years old boundary, can lead to young women and men postponing marriages from 17 years old to 18, but without any change in the underlying social phenomenon that limit their life opportunities.

2. There is a need of a stronger balance between the efforts in gaining attention for the practice of early marriage and addressing the practice of early marriage. In other words, the efforts to maintain early marriage as a central issue in the global agenda should not lead to homogenising young women's experiences or in portraying them always and only as passive victims. For example, there is more need to acknowledge young women's agency, and not referring to them only as 'girls', but young women.
3. Through stronger relational approaches more attention can be given to gender relations, which are the core of the tensions around marriage, pregnancies and sexualities. In contexts where, such as rural Kolda, young women and men are evidencing changes in social and intimate relations, organisations addressing early marriage should strategically reflect on how interventions relate to these changes. These analyses are very important to avoid that in projects, local actors put efforts to re-guide young women and men's behaviours in line with gender arrangements rather than supporting young women and men in enhancing their choices and options. A clear example would be facilitating information and access to contraceptive methods rather than emphasising the importance of abstinence or virginity.
4. The practice of early marriage is strongly linked with broader modes of life and opportunities. Taking into account local realities does not only mean understanding better the 'constraining' socio- cultural and economic factors at these levels. It also means thinking out of the box of the emancipation of women (education-labour market) and supporting initiatives that create alternatives beyond the traditional path of development and modernization. That means enhancing young women and men's wellbeing also if they prefer to stay within their communities.
5. Young women and men could benefit from more inclusive education. Married young women and men are still going to school. It is important that schools are more inclusive, not only in facilitating the continuation of the studies in cases where young women and men marry or have children but also that the contents are relevant to them, to their present and future lives. This includes also the language of instruction, which as shown in the contextual chapter, is still mainly and only French. Language is a very important element to take into account as can facilitate or hinder learning processes. For most young women and men their main language is and will probably continue to be the local one (Pulaar).

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1 : GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN SEMI-STRUCTURÉ pour JEUNES DE KOLDA RURAL

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bonjour, on est Lisa et Sylvie. Lisa est étudiante de la Université d'Amsterdam (Pays Bas) qui fait son recherche sur les jeunes de la région de Kolda. Sylvie est étudiante a Kolda et aide Lisa avec sa recherche et avec les traductions.

Nous voudrions vous poser quelques questions sur vos préférences autour de sujets tels que la famille, école, et le mariage. Votre participation est **volontaire**: vous pouvez choisir de ne pas répondre à des questions ou décider d'arrêter la discussion à tout moment. Nous tenons également à vous assurer que vos réponses seront données la **confidentialité maximale**. **Êtes-vous prêt à participer à cette étude?**

OUI / NON / STOP ENTRETIEN...

Nous tenons également à enregistrer cette interview pour vous assurer que nous capturons tout, est-ce OK avec vous? Encore une fois, votre confidentialité sera garantie.

OUI/ NON

#### 2. INFORMATION GENERAL

2.1 On va commencer avec une présentation. Pourriez-vous vous présenter ?

Nom:

Genre:

Age:

Village ou elle/il habite :

Village ou elle/il est grandi :

Langue principal

Autres langues

Téléphone

État Civil : Marrie, divorcé, célibataire, autres

Enfants :

Chef de ménage, autres avec qui elle/il habite

Ethnie

#### 3. ÉCOLE/ ÉTUDES

3.1 Est- ce que vous êtes étudiante maintenant ?

SI OUI :

- a. À quelle école ?
- b. A quel niveau vous êtes maintenant ?
- c. A quel âge vous avez commencé l'école ? (pourquoi/ qui à décide) ?
- d. Vous aimerais étudier jusqu'à quel niveau ? Pourquoi ?
- e. Est- ce que vous anticipé des obstacles pour continuer avec vos études ? Lesquelles ?

- f. Les décisions sur vos études, vous les prenez avec qui ? Pourquoi ?
- g. Est-ce que vous anticipé des difficultés ou facilités pour continuer avec vos études ?
- h. Comment pensez-vous que tes études pourront t'aider dans vos avenir ?

#### SI NON

- a. Est-ce que vous êtes allé à l'école avant ?
- b. Vous avez fait jusqu'à quel niveau ?
- c. Vous avez commencé à quel âge ?
- d. Pourquoi vous avez arrêté ?
- e. Qui a pris la décision d'arrêter vos études? Avec qui vous en avez parlé ?
- f. Est-ce que l'école vous a aidé avec ce que vous fait maintenant ? Comment ?

### **4. LA FAMILLE (ORIGIN)**

4.1 Est-ce que vous pouvez décrire la composition de votre famille ?

- a. Combien de sœurs et frères vous avez ?

Cote Père

Coté Mère

Même Père et mère :

Vous êtes quel numéro ?

- b. Mère Père : Vos Père est ce que il est marié plusieurs fois ?

4.2 Avec qui vous habitez maintenant ?

4.3 Comment et votre relation avec les autres membres de vos famille ?

- Père
- Mère
- Frères
- Sœurs

4.4 Avec qui vous avez la plus confiance ? Pourquoi ?

4.5 Qui est le/la chef de ménage dans votre famille ?

- Qu'est-ce que signifie être le chef de ménage ?

4.6 Comment est la prise de décisions dans votre famille ?

- Est-ce que vous pouvez prendre décisions vous-mêmes ? Quelles ?

3.7 Quels sont vos rôles dans la famille ?

- Avec qui vous le fait?

3.8 Est-ce que la famille est important pour vous ? Pourquoi ?

3.9 Comment pensez-vous que la religion et vos ethnie influence la famille ?

### **5. MARRIAGE**

5.1 Est-ce que le mariage (en général) est important?

5.2 Pourquoi vous pensez que le mariage est important ?Qu'est-ce que le mariage signifie pour vous ?

5.3 Comment pensez-vous que la religion et vos ethnie influence la famille ?

#### 5.4 Êtes-vous marié ?

##### SI NON

- a. Est- ce que vous voudriez vous marié ? Pour quoi ?
- b. Quand ou à quelle âge voudriez-vous vous marié ? Pourquoi ?
- c. Qui décidera quand vous allez vous marie ?
- d. Avec qui vous voudriez vous marié ? Que est ce que c'est important pour vous dans un marie ?
- e. Qui va choisir votre marie ?
- f. Quel est le rol de vos parents dans les décisions sur votre mariage ?
- g. Est- ce que vous parlez sur mariage avec votre famille ? Avec qui ? De que est ce que vous parlez ?
- h. Est-ce que vous pensé que le mariage va changer votre vie ? Comment ?

##### Si OUI

- a. Quand est ce que vous avez marié ?
- b. Est-ce que vous étiez d'accord ? Pourquoi ?
- c. Typologie de mariage : où est ce que vous avez marié ?
- d. Comment c'est passé la célébration ?
- e. Pourquoi vous avez marié ?
- f. Qui à pris la décision ?
- g. Est- ce que vous avez participé à la décision ? Comment ?
- h. Avec qui vous avez marié ?  
Age et provenance  
Est-ce que vous connaissez d'avant ? Depuis combien de temps ?  
Qui a choisi ?
- i. Comment et la relation avec vos marie ?
- j. Comment et la relation avec la famille de vos marie ?
- k. Comment vous vous sentez dans le mariage ? ? Pourquoi ?
- l. Est- ce que votre vie à changer avec le mariage ? Comment ?

#### **6. COPIN/COPINE**

##### 6.1 Est- ce que vous avez ou vous avez eu un copine ou copine ? A quelle âge ?

- a. Combien à durer la relation ?
- b. Comment vous avez connu ?
- c. Qu'est-ce que la relation a signifié pour vous ?
- d. Qu'est-ce que vous aimez de lui/elle ?
- e. Est-ce que vous avez eu l'idée de vous marié ? Pourquoi ?
- f. Est-ce que vos parents savent de la relation ? Qui en sait/savez ?
- g. Qu'est ce que vous faites/partager ensemble ?

#### **7. PLANIFICATION FAMILIAL**

a. Est-ce que vous avez des enfants ? Combien ? Quel Age ?

Si les Enfants sont pas dans le mariage :

- a. Comment à réagi la famille ?
- b. Comment été et est encore la relation avec le père ?
- c. Qu'est-ce que a signifié pour elle/lui avoir un enfant ?
- d. Est-ce que ça à changer sa vie ? Comment ?

7.2 Combien des enfants voudriez vous avoir ? Pourquoi ?

7.3 Est-ce que vous connaissez méthodes de planification familial et/ou de protection ?

7.4 Quels méthodes vous connaissez ?

7.5 Est-ce que vous les avez utilisé ?

7.6 Est- ce que vous utilisez des méthodes de planification familial dans le mariage ?

7.7 Est-ce que vous parlez avec votre marie/femme ou copain/copine sur la planification familial ?

## **8. Autres Questions Générales :**

8.1 Qu'est que c'est pour vous un mariage précoce ?

8.2 Qu'est- ce que c'est pour vous un mariage forcé ?

8.3 Qu'est ce que vous pensez sur le mariage précoce et le mariage forcé ?

8.4 Pensez-vous que les filles dans vos village participe sur les décisions sur le mariage ?  
Comment et pourquoi ?

8.5 Pensez-vous que les garçons dans vos village participe sur les décisions sur le mariage ?  
Comment ? Pourquoi ?

## **CLOTURE**

Remercier la participation

Est- ce que vous avez quelque autre chose que vous voulez raconter ?

Est-ce que vous avez des questions ?

## **OBSERVATIONS**

Autres 'probes' :

Est-ce que vous pouvez expliquer ça en peut plus/ développer/ ?

Qu'est ce que vous voulez dire avec xxx

Pourquoi ?

Comment ?

Silence

## ANNEX 2: OPEN INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND TEACHERS

Quel est votre rôle dans la communauté comme imam/ chef de village/professeur ?

Qu'est ce que signifie pour vous être le chef de village/imam/professeur dans la communauté ?

Depuis quand vous êtes le chef de village/imam/professeur de la communauté

Qu'est ce que c'est un mariage précoce?

Qu'est ce que c'est un mariage force?

Quelle est la situation des mariages précoce dans la communauté ?

Et des mariages forcé ?

Quelles sont, selon vous, les causes de les mariage précoce et/ou forcé ?

Quelle sont vos recommandations sur les mariages précoce et/ou forcé ?



### ANNEX 3 : LIST OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- I.1 Unmarried young woman, 17 years old*
- I.2 Unmarried young woman, 17 years old*
- I.3 Unmarried young woman, 16 years old*
- I.4 Unmarried young woman, 17 years old*
- I.5 Unmarried young woman, 16 years old*
- I.6 Unmarried young man, 20 years old*
- I.7 Married young man, 23 years old*
- I.8 Married young woman, 17 years old*
- I.9 Unmarried young woman, 15 years old*
- I.10 Unmarried young man, 28 years old*
- I. 11 Unmarried young man, 20 years old*
- I. 12 Unmarried young man, 15 years old*
- I.13 Unmarried young man, 17 years old*
- I. 14 Unmarried young woman, 18 years old*
- I. 15 Unmarried young woman, 24 years old*
- I.16 Unmarried young woman, 14 years old*
- I.17 Unmarried young woman, 16 years old*
- I.18 Unmarried young woman, 14-15 years old*
- I. 19 Unmarried young woman, 16 years old*
- I. 20 Married young woman, 18 years old*
- I. 21 Married young man, 20 years old*
- I. 22 Married young man, 22 years old*
- I. 23 Unmarried young woman, 14 years old*
- I. 24 Married young woman, 21 years old*
- I. 25 Married and divorces young woman, 20 years old*
- I.26 Unmarried young woman, 18 years old*
- I.27 Unmarried young woman, 14-15-16 years old*
- I.28 Married young woman, 21-22 years old*
- I.29 Married young woman, 23 years old*
- I.30 Unmarried young man, 23 years old*
- I.31 Unmarried young man, 20-21 years old*
- I.32 Married young woman, 19 years old*
- I.33 Married young woman, 25 years old*
- I.34 Married young woman, 23-24 years old*
- I.35 Married young woman, 15 years old*
- I.36 Unmarried young man, 22 years old*
- I.37 Unmarried young man, 23 years old*
- I.38 Married young man, 27 years old*
- I.39 Married young man, 28 years old*
- I.40 Imam Kolda community*

- I.41 Imam Kolda town***
- I.42 Chef de village 1***
- I.43 Chef de village 2***
- I.44 Chef de village 3***
- I.45 Teacher primary school, community***
- I.46 Teacher secondary school, community***
- I.47 Teacher secondary school, Kolda town***
- I.48 Teacher secondary school, community***
- I.49 Father***
- I.50 Mother 1***
- I.51 Mother 2***
- I.52 Representative local administration 1, Kolda town***
- I.53 Representative local administration 2, community***
- I.54 Other youth, married young man, Kolda town, 22 years old***
- I.55 Other youth, married young man, Kolda town, 26 years old***
- I.56 Other youth, unmarried young woman, Kolda town, 27 years old***
- I.57 National UNFPA staff***
- I.58 Regional UNFPA staff, 1***
- I.59 Regional UNFPA staff, 2***
- I.60 Donor Staff***

## ANNEX 4 : FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

**Bienvenue:** Bonjour à tous et merci pour votre participation dans ce focus group. Je m'appelle Lisa, je viens de la Université de Amsterdam, au Pays Bas. Je suis à Kolda depuis 2 mois pour une recherche sur les préférences des jeunes de Kolda autour de la famille et le mariage. Lui / Elle est .....

**Objectif:** L'objectif de le focus group c'est de discuter ensemble sur le mariage et la famille. Nous aimerions qu'on essaye de penser un peu sur les différences et les similarités entre hommes et femmes, filles et garçons, autour de le mariage et la famille. C'est pour ça que on vous a choisi ; comme jeunes de Thietty/Sare Bidgi, et dans un group mix de garçons et filles.

### Instructions:

- C'est important de remarquer que dans cette discussion il y pas des réponses corrects ou incorrects, tous les opinions et idées son également bonnes. Vous ne devez pas être d'accord avec tout ce que les autres disent dans le group. Si vous n'êtes pas d'accord, dit le.
- On espère que vous vous sentez alèse et ouverts à participer et parler. Vos opinions son très important pour la recherche.
- Il y a pas un ordre pour participer, quand vous avez quelque chose a dire, sentez-vous libre de le dire.
- Nous ferons de modérateur/facilitateur.

**Conditions:** On va enregistrer la session en audio pour prendre note de tous vos commentaires. Mais on veut remarquer que tous vos contributions sont anonymes et confidentielles. De la même façon on vous demande que ce que vous dites ici, reste ici. Si pendant la session vous avez des questions ou des commentaires, vous pouvez toujours les poser.

1. **PRESENTATION :** On va commencer avec une présentation. On va dire un pour un notre nom, âge et ou on habite. Si vous veuillez vous pouvez dire aussi quelque chose de vous-mêmes. (5 Min)
2. **DESCRIPTION D'UNE FOTO :** Ici il y a différents photos. Chaque un peut choisir une. Vous prenez et vous avez un minute pour la regarder. Après vous aller décrire ce que vous voyez. (15 Min)
  - a.** Description
  - b.** Qu'est-ce que tu en pense ?
  - c.** Tu vois cette situation dans ton village ?
  - d.** Quelqu'un veut ajouter autre contribution/interpretation/detail ?
3. **GROUP BRAINSTORMING :** (20 Min)
  - A.** En deux groups (hommes et femmes), vous allez penser sur le mariage. Vous répondez 3 questions :
    - a) Quelle est l'importance du mariage pour les filles / garçons

- b) Quand se marier (filles/Garçons)
- c) Avec qui se marier (filles/garçons)

Partager les résultats

**B.** Qui décide dans tout ce qu'on a mentionné ? Comment les filles participent dans ces décisions ? Comment les garçons participent dans ces décisions ?

- 4. **STORYTELLING**:Chaqueun écrit une petite histoire/ description sur votre avenir : comment vous vous imaginer dans quelques années ? Qu'est-ce que vous désirez ? (10 min)
- 5. **CONCLUDING** : De tout ce qu'on a parlé, qu'est que c'est le plus important pour vous ? Est-ce que il reste quelque chose à dire ? (10 min)

## ANNEX 5 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS DATA BASE

Table 2. Descriptives age rank 12-18

	AGE	SI OUI, AGE AU MARIAGE
count	494	32
mean	14.73684	15.375
std	2.04006	1.211503997
min	12	13
25%	13	14
50%	15	15
75%	16	16
max	18	18

Table 2. Descriptives age rank 15-18

	AGE	SI OUI, AGE AU MARIAGE
count	260	29
mean	16.430769	15.51724138
std	1.1249262	1.18384029
min	15	13
25%	15	15
50%	16	16
75%	17	16
max	18	18

## ANNEX 6 : PICTURES

### First days in Dakar: cultural adaptation



Picture 14: Tabaski in Dakar



Picture 13: Trying new things



Picture 15: At the end of a organizational workshop on SRHR with ENDA JA-Kolda

Getting along and with my gatekeepers:



Picture 16: Picture with Lamarana and Aissatoy, gatekeepers, community fieldworkers



Picture 17: With Cheriff, gatekeeper, translator, general support, colleague



## Sharing with the communities



Picture 19: At the house of a community leader



Picture 18: With other youth from the communities



Moving from one community to another



Picture 20: By horse



Picture 21: By foot



Picture 22: By Jakarta

## Collecting data



Picture 24: Before the start of a community debate

Picture 23: Before an interview



Picture 25: Preparing an activity during the girls camp



Supporting local organizations: ENDA JA and Parole aux Jeunes



Picture 27: Receiving visits at ENDA JA



Picture 26: At an activity of Parole aux Jeunes



Picture 28: Challenges

Others



Picture 29: Chat with with young women and men



Picture 30: Chat with married young women



Picture 31: Girls camp





Picture 32: Singing at the girls camp



Picture 33: After lunch



Picture 34: With Awa!