Critical geographies of love and loss: relational responses to the death of a spouse in Senegal

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Abstract

Marriage practices in the Majority world may differ considerably from dominant cultural ideals in the Minority world of 'romantic love' and 'companionate marriage' based on monogamous relationships. Similarly, mourning in the 'rest' of the world often diverges from assumptions within Anglophone bereavement studies of a 'grieving journey'. This paper provides a gendered, spatial, relational analysis of responses to the death of a spouse in Senegal, based on in-depth interviews with Serer women and men in rural and urban communities. A heightened sense of relationality with the deceased surrounded widows' bodies, with permeable boundaries that needed to be contained and "purified" through widowhood-mourning practices in order to restore social cohesion. For men, the space of the home was transformed, sometimes unbearably, by the loss of a wife and mother due to their central role in home-making practices, transforming men's relational being. 'Embodied relationality', alongside material constraints, also shaped perspectives on remarriage. The paper reveals the diverse material, embodied, spatial, and often explicitly gendered, ways that the effects of the death of a spouse may be manifested in the experience of the living person and draws attention to the permeable embodied boundaries of 'relational being' that encompass the living and the dead.

Key words

Geographies of love

Companionate marriage

Mourning and loss

Embodied relationality

Materiality

Feminist ethnography

Senegal, West Africa

1. Introduction

Marriage practices in the Majority world[1] may differ considerably from dominant cultural ideals in the Minority world of 'romantic love' and 'companionate marriage' based on monogamous relationships. Similarly, mourning in the 'rest' of the world (Hall, 2002) often diverges from assumptions within Anglophone bereavement studies of a 'grieving journey' that follows the death of a spouse. This paper provides a gendered, spatial, relational analysis of the experiences of middle-aged and older men and women whose spouse had died in rural and urban Senegal, socio-spatial environments which bring into sharp relief dominant framings of 'love' and 'grief'.

Morrison et al (2012, p.506) call for more geographical work to analyse love as spatial, relational and political, unpacking the ways that "power circulates in love relationships" and recognising that love is contingent on specific spatial and temporal contexts. Despite widespread recognition of the dominance of "western" cultural narratives of an idealized and essentialised version of romantic love (based on heterosexual, monogamous relationships), few geographical studies to date have critically examined "what love does" in Majority world contexts. Indeed, marriage and intimate relationships between men and women in Africa are often regarded as rather unremarkable, unless they pertain to what are deemed 'problematic' issues related to sexuality, such as child marriage, HIV, transactional sex or concern about fertility, polygamy, divorce or the growing number of female-headed households (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi 2006). This lacuna reflects imperialist, religious and heteronormative

framings in which marriage between different genders is taken for granted in many post-colonial contexts (Thomas and Cole, 2009).

Meanwhile, anthropological and geographical studies of death in the Majority world place a strong emphasis on rituals and community processes of mourning, healing and consolation following a death (de Klerk, 2013). This focus contrasts sharply with the dominant psychologised, individualised framing of 'grief' and 'bereavement' in the Minority world (Rosenblatt and Bowman, 2013; Klass, 1999). A distinction is drawn between 'mourning' which is regarded as a collective process and often associated with the rituals of "non-western Others" (Valentine, 2006), and 'grief', which concerns an individual's "inner" emotional state (Klass, 1999). Such binary, universalising approaches fail to recognise the relational nature of responses to death. Klass (1999) suggests that a focus on "responses to death" is more fruitful than a focus on an individualised notion of "grief".

This paper contributes unique insights into the meanings of intimate heterosexual relationships that have been lost through death and how continuing bonds with the deceased are manifested in embodied, material forms in particular spaces. While feminist geographies of embodiment have deepened understandings of emotions and gendered performances in different spaces (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014), embodied relationships between the living and the dead are rarely discussed. Furthermore, the majority of studies have focused on Anglophone research settings. As Wright (2012) points out, paying attention to emotions and social experiences of suffering is long overdue within development contexts, since such analyses can provide crucial insights into material conditions and can help to move towards postcolonial understandings. Anthropological studies have provided important insights into

love, kinship and mourning in diverse cultural contexts, but often do not explicitly analyse the spatialities of the experience of bereavement, which this paper addresses.

Senegal provides a complex social milieu to investigate the loss of a spouse, since it is characterised by a post-colonial French, Islamic and indigenous heritage, with accompanying legal pluralism and diversity in marriage and mourning practices. The majority of the population (94 per cent) are Muslim, while a minority are Christian (4 per cent) and animists and other religions (2 per cent) (ANSD, 2013). The statutory Family Code accommodates polygamy, with a default rule whereby the marriage is considered polygamous if a husband fails to make a choice. In practice, most Muslim men marry at the mosque and do not make an explicit choice, enabling them to take a second wife or more later if they wish. Roman Catholic couples usually marry at the *Mairie* [town hall/ registry office] where they commit to monogamous marriage and hold a church service afterwards, although this may not be synchronous and customary marriage is often also celebrated.

More is known about the family life and culture of the Wolof, the largest ethnic group in Senegal than other ethnic groups (Bass and Sow, 2006). The Serer ethnic group, who represent approximately 15% of the population of Senegal (ibid) and traditionally live in rural communities in the main groundnut growing regions, in addition to urban areas, was intentionally selected for this research to provide insight into diverse family lives and syncretism of religious and indigenous cultural practices. The Serer adopted Islam, and to a lesser extent, Catholicism, during the twentieth century, later than most other ethnic groups in Senegal. Polygamy is slightly less common among the Serer (38 per cent of marriages are polygamous compared with 44–50 per cent among other ethnicities: Bass and Sow 2006).

Levirate marriage, or 'widow inheritance' as it has been referred to elsewhere, whereby a younger brother or other paternal relative may remarry the widow, is commonly practised, particularly in rural areas. Two rural research locations in Diourbel and Fatick regions provided a contrast of rural livelihoods and differing religious affiliations, alongside working-class neighbourhoods in Dakar, the capital city.

While studies of marriage and mourning provide important points of departure, I argue that a deeper relational analysis of men's and women's intimate relationships and 'embodied relationality' with the deceased is needed, exploring gendered experiences of mourning, what has been lost through the death of a spouse, and how this shapes their outlook on remarriage. This paper provides insight into the diverse material, embodied and spatialised ways that the death of a spouse may be manifested in experience of the living bereaved. Rituals such as the seclusion of widows in the home for a specific temporal period may seek to classify and contain gendered bodies and inanimate objects due to their close association with death. Yet the emotions and materiality of loss and embodied relationality with the deceased continued for months or years after the time-space of mourning rituals. For men, the space of the home was transformed, sometimes unbearably, by the loss of a wife and mother due to their central role in home-making practices, as well as transforming men's relational being-in-the-world. I argue that emotions and materiality are inseparable, producing embodied intimate relations among the living and the dead in particular spaces that are bound up with gendered inequalities.

I first review geographical and anthropological literature on love and loss and discuss the feminist geographical conceptual approach, focusing on embodiment, relationality and the

home and building on understandings from anthropological and death studies. Following an overview of the research methods, I discuss relational spaces of mourning, the body and the home, which were constantly unfolding through co-action in relationship (Gergen, 2009), both among the living and in their relationships with the dead.

1.1 Love and loss

Emotions have been recognised as inherently relational, emerging through interactions between bodies, objects and places (Davidson et al, 2005). 'Love' is associated with multiple meanings and emotions that include care and intimacy (Morrison et al, 2012). Emotional geographers have underscored the need to retain a sense of plurality and non-universalist understanding of emotional registers such as 'love' or 'hate' through analyses of gendered, racialised and other power geometries that shape the social world (Tolia-Kelly, 2006).

Wardlow and Hirsch (2006) suggest that couples in a range of global settings are increasingly emphasising emotional intimacy in a shift towards "companionate marriage", defined as a "marital ideal in which emotional closeness is understood to be both one of the primary measures of success in marriage and a central practice through which the relationship is constituted and reinforced" (p.4). They emphasise two aspects of companionate marriage: first, the idea of companionship as a deliberate goal of marriage, within a wider notion of marriage as a project orientated towards individual fulfilment and satisfaction rather than (or in addition to) social reproduction; second, how the modern discourse of love provides insight into emerging notions of individuality in terms of the choice of one particular person as a partner.

Understandings of 'modern companionate marriage' appear to differ considerably from conventional marriage practices in many African societies. Rather than being regarded as the union of two individuals based on idealised notions of 'romantic love', traditionally in many African societies, marriage was regarded as an alliance between families and lineages. Indigenous customary marriage practices are usually a social process between families that involve a series of rites or ceremonies over an extended time period, often including the gift exchange of 'bridewealth' for a wife and her children. Marriage continues to be characterised by considerable diversity of unions and practices of patrilocality, matrilocality and/or non-cohabitation of husband and wife among different ethnic and religious groups (Oheneba-Sakyi and Takyi, 2006).

Several authors comment on the perceived materiality or transactional nature of intimate relationships between men and women in Africa, which 'westerners' may find unsettling, despite the long history of such marriages in much of the Minority world (Durham, 2002; Thomas and Cole, 2009). Material provision and emotional attachment need to be understood as "mutually constitutive", since material exchanges not only reflect, but "produce emotionally charged relationships" (Thomas and Cole, 2009, p.21). In Botswana, Durham (2002, p.167) suggests that love is "deeply experienced as a form of caring about the well-being of others, a care and concern that motivates all sorts of actions to promote the well-being of the other/ others". When a man fulfils his wife's or lover's requests for material support, he is signalling concern that is equated with love. Such acts of love and reciprocity bind people together and communality is established (Durham, 2002).

Death, as a life crisis, can be regarded as a vital conjuncture (Johnson-Hanks, 2002), a key moment of transition, change and flux within which gender identities may be "asserted, re-formulated or contested" (Hockey, 2003, p.2). Widowhood 'purification' rituals and 'widow inheritance' or remarriage practices among the husband's kin are characterised by significant diversity of practices in African societies, varying according to ethnicity, place and time (Potash, 1986; Thomas, 2008). Few studies explore men's experiences as widowers, which is likely to be linked to their perceived 'invisibility' compared to widows, particularly when polygyny is commonly practised. Mourning rituals are rarely associated with men and the word 'widower' may not exist in African languages, such as in Wolof, the most commonly spoken indigenous language in Senegal (Author et al, 2017). This paper furthers understandings of men's perspectives of the loss of a spouse.

2. Conceptual approach

This paper adopts a feminist geographical approach which seeks to analyse the socio-spatialities of emotions and embodiment in mourning, materialities of the home and remarriage practices. I attend closely to relationality between the living and the dead, embodiment and gendered power geometries within heterosexual marital relationships in a particular cultural context.

Geographers have emphasised that emotions such as love are lived and experienced *through* the body, "the site of emotional experience and expression *par excellence*" (Davidson and Milligan, 2004, p.523). Work on embodiment has provided crucial insights into "how gender is lived, thought about and practised through imaginary, discursive and material bodies" (Longhurst and Johnston, 2014, p.274). Drawing on phenomenology, Maclaren (2014, p.56)

draws a distinction between "ontological intimacy" and "concrete *experiences* of intimacy": "our *experiences* of intimacy typically require that a shared world comes to be *instituted* between oneself and the other and that one's sense of identity comes to be *habitually informed* by the other". She suggests that in enduring relationships, others become a "*habitual* part of our embodiment", pointing to this as the reason why the loss of an intimate other can be experienced as an ontological threat to our being-in-the-world: "To lose an intimate other to death is not just to remove one person from one's world, but to have that world fall apart and to feel one's own identity put into question" (Maclaren, 2014, p.61).

Furthermore, cultural psychologist, Gergen's (2009, p.5) notion of "relational being" recognises a world that is, "not within persons but within their relationships and that ultimately erases the traditional boundaries of separation". Emotions and actions are regarded as "relational performances", the authenticity and validity of which depend on time and space (Gergen, 2009, p.104). These understandings of relationality and embodiment are helpful in interpreting men's and women's embodied performances of mourning and responses to death that were co-created in the space of the research interview, as well as within the home and community.

The home has been recognised as a paradigmatic space of gendered power relations, heterosexuality and intimacy (McKie et al, 1999; Morrison, 2012), which is constantly performed, reproduced and contested through everyday home-making practices and domestic routines (Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Jilek, 2020). Further, Carsten's (2004, p.37) notion of "relatedness' suggests that "kinship is made in and through houses", drawing attention to shared understandings, bodily practices and memories of those who have lived together. This

is particularly pertinent after a death, when the material spaces and inanimate objects of the home may be regarded as gendered, heterosexual "environments of memory" (Hockey et al, 2005, p.140): "the spaces which remain, the objects left behind, and the practices now uncompleted, stand as social trails of particular gendered persons".

Many death studies have highlighted the significance of 'continuing bonds' with the deceased, which may be a significant source of solace (Jedan, Maddrell and Venbrux, 2019). Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik (2014) question the assumption that the death of a significant other marks an absolute break with their materiality. Drawing on the feminist ethic of care, they highlight how relational approaches that "work outside the mind/body split enable other possibilities, including the continuing bond after death being embodied via the living bereaved" (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014, p.32). Their notion of 'embodied relationality' is helpful in conceptualising the ways that an embodied relationship with the deceased does not die with the person, but rather continues through caring about and for the deceased, which may be expressed through a variety of material forms. Continuing materiality with the deceased thus refers to "the lived experience and perceived reality of embodiment understood in the light of relations with others and social norms" (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik 2014, p.33).

Underpinned by an understanding of the unboundedness of 'relational being' and emotional geographies of love, embodiment and the home, I draw on the notion of 'embodied relationality' to explore participants' continuing relationships with the deceased, which were expressed in highly embodied ways through widowhood-mourning rituals, memories evoked in the materiality of the home, and imagined futures of remarriage.

3. Research methods

A feminist ethnographic methodology was adopted to explore responses to death among Serer families in rural and urban Senegal[2]. Although my original research aims focused on inheritance practices, I quickly realised that researching this topic inevitably involves seeking to understand what the death meant to family members, which was important to investigate in its own right, while also furthering understandings of the material consequences (see Author, 2016). The semi-structured interview schedule was designed from a lifecourse perspective and used flexibly.

The rural research locations comprised: small villages inhabited by Muslims in the rural community of Tocky Gare, in land-locked Diourbel region, where livelihoods were predominantly focused on groundnut, millet, sorghum and bean cultivation and livestock rearing; and villages and islands inhabited by Muslims and Roman Catholics in Fimela rural community, Sine Saloum, in the coastal region of Fatick, where livelihood opportunities exist in artisanal fishing and tourism, in addition to groundnut, millet and rice cultivation and livestock rearing. Urban working-class districts and suburbs of Dakar (Médina, Guèdiawaye, Keur Massar and Yeumbeul), the capital city, were selected as a contrast to rural locations. While rural/urban dimensions are highlighted where relevant, the focus of this paper is on spaces of mourning, the body and home, rather than on place-based differences (see Author, 2016 for rural place-based analyses).

Using key gatekeepers, NGO contacts and snowballing techniques, a purposive sample of 20 Serer families who had experienced an adult relative's death in recent years was identified.

Two members of each family were interviewed in most cases, giving a total of 33 family interviewees. The majority of families (17/20) were Muslim, with three Roman Catholic families. This paper draws predominantly on interviews with 12 women and 6 men (aged 30-73 years), whose spouse had died and with 7 male religious and community leaders (3 imams, 1 Catholic priest, 2 village *notables* [nobles/elders] and 1 head of district). For most participants, the death had occurred within the last three years, ranging from a few months to up to ten years previously, with a range of causes given. Two focus groups with women were also conducted in Tocky Gare and Dakar, alongside interviews with 11 governmental and non-governmental representatives. Informal observations of family and community life were recorded in a research journal.

Reflexivity is crucial to cross-cultural and feminist approaches to researching intimate relationships. As a white British woman of Christian heritage, I was positioned as an "outsider" with relative privilege in terms of education and wealth that facilitated access to participants. Yet I had an ambivalent positioning among participants as an unmarried woman without children, about which men often asked; I was not expected to wear a headscarf that married women my age usually wore.

Alongside my own social location, interpreters' positionality often directly influences research encounters. I employed a Serer Muslim middle-aged man living in Dakar with a good level of education to provide French-Serer and -Wolof interpretation. Due to his role as a familiar, trusted relative in Fimela, I was able to undertake more extensive research there than in Tocky Gare, to which I gained access through a women's organisation. Male elders, imams and family members seemed particularly comfortable with him, talking at length in

interviews. In two interviews with widows in Dakar when the usual interpreter was unavailable, I employed a young, female, Wolof Muslim researcher. I felt that my own and the interpreter's shared gender with the women helped to put them more at ease in expressing their emotions. I conducted some interviews in French without an interpreter for those who were comfortable speaking French, gained through the French education system, and felt that communicating directly with participants helped to reduce the distance between us.

I acknowledge that the multiple languages used add layers of complexity to interpreting participants' experiences (Author et al, 2017). I sought to minimise taken-for-granted assumptions and translators' limited fluency in English through employing a different Serer research assistant to transcribe and translate into French, while some Wolof and French interviews were transcribed and translated by the Wolof researcher. I translated quotations from interviews cited in this article from French to English.

After reviewing the transcripts, an analytic summary of each interview was written to assist in reading across the data. The interpretation was informed by an intersectional lifecourse perspective and responses to death, in addition to the conceptual approach in this paper. The project was granted ethical clearance by University of Reading Research Ethics Committee and participants' accounts have been anonymised. This exploratory study does not aim to be representative of Serer men's and women's experiences of the death of a spouse, but rather provides qualitative insights into geographies of love and loss in a particular socio-spatial context.

4. Gendered seclusion in the home

The narratives of women whose husband had died suggest that mourning practices and rituals surrounding 'widowhood' represented a liminal time-space that was socially structured by gendered constructions of a wife's role and her continuing embodied relationship with the deceased. The women interviewed confirmed that they had all observed widowhood-mourning. The usual time-space rhythms of women's social reproductive and livelihood activities were temporarily suspended and they withdrew from social life in the community. They received condolences and spent time in their room predominantly in prayer, mourning and contemplation, while others took care of domestic, care and income-earning responsibilities within the household. The home space, which dominant ideologies often associate with domesticity and femininity (Blunt and Dowling, 2005), thus became one of confinement and gendered seclusion from communal life, restricting women's agency.

For Muslim widows, this period lasted usually for four months and ten days, although there were some disparities in reports of the prescribed time-period. Women detailed a range of rituals, which varied slightly according to their place of origin, focused on wearing a specific '*pagne*' (two-piece cloth wrappers which women wear) as a veil to cover their hair and ears, and her body, which was usually given to the widow by the husband's family. Her hair was sometimes plaited by the husband's sisters. The widow could only wash herself and the *pagne* on Fridays (which holds particular religious significance for Muslims). Many women also said they were not allowed to speak loudly and should not speak ill of others.

After four months and ten days, following a spiritually cleansing bath and ceremony to mark the end of her mourning, a woman was no longer considered a widow; she could wear

ordinary clothes, perfume and jewellery, unplait her hair, return to her usual activities. The *pagne* she had worn and special utensils she had used were returned to the husband's family. For Catholic women living in Fimela, the mourning period lasted for either six months or one year. Rather than the brightly coloured, patterned *pagne* that Muslim widows wore, Catholic widows wore a black veil and wrapper throughout this period, which marked them out from other women. The end of widowhood-mourning represented a significant transition in women's lives, as they re-joined society and adjusted to changed domestic and livelihood responsibilities and roles within the household, sometimes becoming head of the household and/or *'kilifa'* (the family's key decision-maker, moral authority, or patriarch) if there was no other male relative who took on this responsibility.

Writing of the Herero in Botswana, Durham (2002, p.171) suggests that widows, "whose existence is so very much bound up with the deceased, […] take on the physical signs and conditions of death itself (decay and dirt, immobility, silence)". In this light, widowhood-mourning in Senegal could be interpreted as a communal expectation that wives should embody the death in their own bodies and accompany the deceased during this period, supporting understandings of the "permeability of the embodied boundaries" between the living and the dead (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014, p.37). Serer rituals of returning gendered bodily objects given by the husband's family and used by the widow during this transitional mourning period, alongside the purification ceremony, appear to symbolically free a woman from embodied traces of the death and her marital relationship. This illustrates how gendered material objects associated with death may be classified through ritualisation in order to subvert their fetishistic power (Hockey et al, 2005).

Most participants did not mention any mourning rituals that widowers practised, although some said that men were expected to observe a period of contemplation and sexual restraint for 40-45 days following the death of their wife. Ousmane, a Muslim man living in Guédiawaye observed that traditionally among the Serer, the role of a husband was to bury his wife: *"In their tradition, a man who loses his wife accompanies her to her last resting place […] In principle, it's a man who buries his wife, the others, they will accompany you".* Muslim women and young children did not usually attend the burial in Senegal. One Muslim man in Tocky Gare pointed to a Serer tradition of a widower wearing a small piece of the wife's *pagne* (cloth wrapper) for a week following the death to symbolise that he was in mourning. Similarly to widowhood-mourning, this ritual of keeping a piece of the wife's clothing close to their body for a specific time period can be seen as a means of classifying a gendered residual object (Hockey et al, 2005), as well as representing a highly embodied way of manifesting a widower's changed status, which may help to console men.

Many have suggested that rituals provide a source of consolation and healing after death in African societies (Ndiaye, 2012). Yet none of the women articulated a sense of the widowhood-mourning practices as helping to console them. A few mentioned that it had helped them to become more religious and devoted to prayer. Their predominant response, however, was to comment on how restrictive they had found the mourning period. Some women in Guédiawaye emphasised that they had to stay in their room at all times:

> *"When you do widowhood-mourning, you don't go outside, you don't do anything […] You must stay in your room. Even if you want to go to the toilet* [across the

> courtyard within the household compound], *you have to cover yourself with the veil"* (Deguène, older widow in mourning).

Widowhood-mourning was regarded as a social and religious obligation and duty of a wife, motivated by a concern that non-observance of such rules of behaviour would show disrespect for the dead and cause harm to the widow and other family members. As one woman commented:

> "*if you don't respect widowhood-mourning, that will follow you, that is, ill-fate/misfortune will happen to you or something like that. For us, customs have to be respected, because people say that the dead are not dead, they are living".*

This reveals a spiritual worldview of the interconnectedness of the living and the dead; the dead are present in absence and have continuing agency (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014).

The secrecy surrounding widowhood-mourning practices and the explanation given for the time-period of four months and ten days of seclusion for Muslim widows also reflects this spiritual worldview. Four widows observing widowhood-mourning at the time spoke softly and were hesitant in talking in detail about their experiences, adhering to social expectations of their embodied behaviour and the need to respect the dead. Male elders and imams suggested this time-period was necessary in order to verify if the widow was pregnant with her deceased husband's child:

> *"if she stays four months, ten days at home, that allows people to know if she's pregnant or not; if then she gives birth, they know that it's her deceased husband's. But if she is married just after the death of her husband, that could have harmful consequences for the family"* (imam, Guédiawaye).

Widows' seclusion in the home thus appears to represent a ritualised expression of their continuing embodied relationship with the deceased, including their reproductive capacity. This cultural narrative also illustrates how Islamic religious rules may frame family life and suggests concern about safeguarding the patrilineage; harm may follow if an unborn child was misattributed to the new husband's lineage and patrilineal assets might be wrongfully inherited, according to customary and Islamic law. If the widow was not pregnant, women were "liberated" from the relationship after the purification ceremony, a phrase also used by participants to refer to ending a marriage union through customary practices. They were free to re-join society and remarry if they wished. The purification ritual thus seems to fulfil a similar role to funeral rites in helping to reaffirm communal relationships among the living and restore social cohesion after a death (de Klerk, 2013).

5. Embodied relationality and memories in the home

Having analysed the gendered, embodied experience of mourning in the home, I now explore the socio-spatialities of the loss of the relationship and the meanings participants attributed to the death. Despite processes of ritualisation, which attempt to classify gendered bodies and objects associated with the death and place a temporal limit on mourning, embodied experiences of loss continued for months and years after the death of a spouse. The home

emerges as a crucial site of gendered, heteronormative marital relations that evokes painful memories and a deep sense of embodied relationality, based on a shared life together as a couple and family. As Carsten (2004) observes, marriage and sets of children are often the central relation on which 'houses of memory' are based.

Important differences in the use of romantic or emotional language to describe marital relations and loss are evident in Senegal compared to narratives of "modern companionate marriage" and bereavement that are dominant in the Minority world. Men and women did not explicitly use the word "love" to describe their intimate relationships, but rather talked about affection, care, companionship, a deep sense of loss, loneliness and missing their spouse. The somewhat limited verbalisation of emotional ties and intimacy in participants' narratives of loss is likely to be linked to wider cultural narratives of the need to persevere and not to *"exaggerate"* through tears and other emotional expressions (Author et al, 2018), in addition to cultural worldviews of communal solidarity and relational understandings of personhood, often reflected in the African notion of *Ubuntu* or *Dimbalanté* in Senegal (Author et al, 2017). Thus, the rules of storytelling about participants' lives and relationships in Senegal may be less dominated by narrations of a bounded, individualised notion of self than in Minority world traditions (Gergen, 2009).

Many women talked about their husband's death in terms of the loss of material support and care for the family and their struggle to provide for their children alone. Soxna, a Catholic widow with five young children, said: *"I am profoundly affected. He helped me, supported me and I miss this support. The two of us used to manage together, but now I get by alone, so this has touched me"*. Providing financial support was regarded as a crucial expression of

care, affection and concern for a wife and the family's wellbeing (Author, 2014; Durham, 2002), central to marital relations and home-making practices. As Hannaford and Foley (2015, p.208) observe, a man must perform, "the role of good provider through acts of care and generosity towards his wife, her family, his own parents and other dependents". It is through these actions that a long-term intimate marital bond develops.

Deguène, a widow (aged 70) living in Guédiawaye, summed up how material support from a husband expressed his care and concern: *"there's nothing better than one's husband. Wherever if you need something, he gives it to you".* Intimacy is implicitly expressed here through material actions rather than through explicit emotional expression. Deguène also talked about missing the companionship and domestic life she had shared with her husband for much of her life, since she had married at a young age:

> *If you live with someone, they provide for you, one fine day, they leave you, you will of course feel bad/ pain* [French: *vous aurez mal*]. *From when you were 13 years old, you were always in the company of your husband and you stayed together until you were 70 years old, if he leaves, there will be a part which you will miss.*

The significance of the loss of the relationship was thus expressed through missing a shared life together as a closely bonded couple, that involved domestic routines, child-rearing, family ceremonies, material "things", pleasures and hardships, which were imbued with emotions. The practicalities of domestic routines and uncompleted activities in the home are thus intimately bound up with the emotional experience of bereavement (Hockey et al, 2005). Deguène described her loneliness, now that her husband had left her behind on her own to

fulfil the important role of the *kilifa* or moral authority and key decision-maker, as the eldest surviving family member: *'A kilifa* [patriarch] *is useful in a home. The only one who was left to you, if he leaves, you will be lonely* [French: *solitaire*]'.

In contrast to women's emphasis on material aspects and somewhat brief expression of emotions surrounding their loss, many men talked in more depth about their feelings. Babacar (aged 45) who lived with seven children in Tocky Gare, had lost his wife and baby when she had complications in pregnancy. He spoke perhaps most explicitly about missing his wife's affection, care and companionship:

> *You know that the sokhna* [Wolof for wife] *is half of a man, because apart from your mother who guided your steps until you reached maturity, the person who is closest to you, your accomplice, as you may be well aware, is your wife. I just live with problems now. When you fall ill, there's no-one except your wife who can take good care of you, surround you with all her affection.*

Care, affection and companionship is emphasised here, pointing to dominant gender ideologies of women's mothering, nurturing role (Jilek, 2020). His expression of a wife being "half of a man" also illustrates heteronormative and religious framings of marital relationships between different genders as being complementary, onto which the differential roles and expectations of men and women within a marriage appeared to map.

In common with other men, Babacar felt that, despite experiencing several other family deaths and catastrophes, such as a major fire which destroyed his home and all his savings, nothing compared to the grief he felt at his wife's death:

> *I never wish this to happen to me again in this world. That completely devastated me. Even though it's now five months since then, I have only just started to go back to my activities less than one month ago, I no longer manage to visit other people, she was my friend.*

The closeness of his relationship and loss of a life companion with whom he had previously shared everything is expressed in the simple word, *amie/ friend.* This could be read as indicating emotional intimacy as a partnership between social equals, an ideal that is often implied in the project of "love marriage" (Wardlow and Hirsch, 2006).

Other men had also experienced multiple losses, but identified their marital relationship and if they were married in polygamous unions, their relationship with their first wife, as affecting them most. Mamadou (aged 60), who lived in Fimela, expressed the profound sorrow he felt following the deaths of six children and first wife, whom he regarded as his "companion" and life partner. He experienced feelings of shock, grief and pain over many months when he felt like he was "*living in another world"*. This echoes the powerful language of a 'void' used in our study in urban areas (Author et al, 2018). Loss of a close-knit relationship may be regarded as an existential threat to the bonded self, when the world no longer makes sense, inviting "ontological insecurity" (Gergen, 2009, p.174; Maclaren, 2014).

Memories of Mamadou's wife and a sense of her continued presence, as well as the profound absence, were evoked in particular spaces that he associated with her most; their home and the orchard where she grew fruit:

> *Between her death and the harvest of the groundnuts, I thought I was in another world, I thought I was living in another world. In fact, every time I arrived home, when I saw the children, I thought that the house was a desert, I thought that nothing was in front of me. So, it was very hard. When I arrived home or when I found myself in the orchard, every time I went there, I imagined that she was going to arrive and find me there. When I arrived at home, I imagined that on my arrival, I was going to see her in front of me. That lasted for months, almost a year. [...] So it's very hard.*

A sense of the presence of the deceased is a common feature of continuing bonds (Jedan et al, 2019), which may be welcome or unwelcome. The deceased is absent, but may be felt or remembered as an embodied presence within particular spaces. This 'presence in absence' (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014) in men's lives appeared to be particularly evoked in the home, linked to women's gendered home-making, caring and nurturing roles as a wife. Indeed, *'Ndok'*, the Serer word for the home, literally 'the hut', signals the centrality of the maternal lineage upon which Serer society is based; it refers to a refuge for the founders of the maternal lineage, the family gathering or household/ hearth (Thiaw, 2005, p.49).

Indeed, the hearth, which is closely associated with mothers' traditional roles of cooking and feeding, has been recognised in many anthropological studies as constitutive of the home and central to the making of memories and kinship (Carsten, 2004; Jilek, 2020). For Bachir (aged

40, Tocky Gare) and his baby who was still being breastfed at the time of the death, the loss of a wife/mother and her role in providing sustenance for the family made the space of the home unbearable. He decided it was best for the baby to be entrusted to his older sister who was married with children in another town, as part of kinship care arrangements:

> *I gave him up, to lessen the pain/grief* [French: *la douleur*], *it was necessary to take him far from home, but when he has grown up, I will bring him back home. […] Because he was a very young child who was still very fragile, you understand, if he was at home, the pain/grief would become worse, so I took him there.*

While he seems to be talking of the baby's pain of being separated from his deceased mother, who could no longer provide the sustenance and nurture he needed, the words are ambiguous and could also refer to Bachir's own pain or other family members' grief, which may be felt more acutely in the home space due to the baby's crying. Bachir expressed a sense of being no longer at peace within the empty home, which he associated with his wife's care, nurturing and affection, and was thinking of migrating for work: *"My future is in the hands of God. Anyway, I get by. I am no longer calm, I'm no longer at peace. I am even thinking of travelling"*.

Thus, continuing bonds with the deceased were embodied by the living bereaved through relational performances, based on shared histories of co-action and memories evoked in the materiality of the home.

6. **Remarriage after loss**

The previous sections suggest that the loss of a spouse can be seen as a 'vital conjuncture' (Johnson-Hanks, 2002; Author, 2014) in the lifecourse, characterised by significant emotional upheaval and disruption; a period of flux and transition in which the present and future were called into question. Remarriage could offer a future of intimacy, care and companionship through creating new affective bonds, or could be viewed with considerable apprehension, uncertainty and ambivalence. As Johnson-Hanks (2002, p.878) observes, social institutions frame an individual's alternatives during such periods, making certain aspirations "plausible, possible or almost unthinkable". Of the 12 women and 6 men whose spouse had died, three women and two men had remarried at the time of interview.

Two of the three women had remarried according to levirate practices, whereby they remarried the brother of the deceased. Women in Tocky Gare said they accepted levirate practices as part of Serer culture: *"As it's a practice which comes from tradition, we accept it willingly"*. However, they were keen to emphasise to me that, "*the woman must always give her consent".* The brother that a widow remarried was usually determined by the family according to age/sibling birth order.

Seynabou who had remarried her first husband's younger brother, commented on the stigma and suspicion she faced in mourning two husbands within a few years, which meant she could not contemplate remarriage in future:

> *As for remarrying, I'm not thinking about it because to veil oneself* [referring to widowhood-mourning] *all the time is not easy. To do widowhood-morning and some*

> *time after, do it again, is very difficult. Actually, people will treat you as a bringer of bad luck or other things, even though it's God's will […].*

Her repeated use of the religious refrain, *'it's God's will'* in the interview emphasises her desire to distance herself from suspicions that she was to blame for the deaths, a common gendered expression of stigmatisation.

An imam and a local leader both indicated that levirate remarriage was motivated by material concerns, as a means of the husband's family continuing to provide for the surviving wife and children: "*to take care of her needs for soap and oil"* [symbolising the needs of women in the village; soap for laundry; oil for the paraffin lamp to light her room] (local leader, Tocky Gare). This motivation is reflected in the fact that the usual bridewealth customary marriage practices to 'seal' the union were not usually observed in levirate remarriage. As Seynabou explained: *"His younger brother didn't have to give any more assets, we sealed the marriage simply […] You just celebrate the marriage in total simplicity".*

The material need for a woman's domestic and care work, alongside companionship and potentially to fulfil 'sexual needs', appeared to motivate some men, particularly those with children, to remarry more quickly than women. Mamadou (aged 60), who lived with four of his children, sought a wife from the same maternal lineage as his first wife in a nearby village a year after the deaths of two wives. His decision to remarry was articulated in terms of meeting practical, material needs for care; he sought a woman who would 'replace' the children's deceased mothers, providing consolation and company:

> *"in fact, as I don't know how to prepare meals, I don't know how to draw water, I don't know how to do the laundry or iron, I had to find another mother who could replace their mother. So she could collect water, prepare the meals, pound the millet, wash their clothes and also console them as well as me. So if another mother can replace theirs, she will console me, console the children, she will prepare meals for us. It's for these reasons".*

The centrality of "mothering-as-home-making practice" is evident here, despite not his new wife not having biological ties to the children (Jilek, 2020). The fact that Mamadou specifically sought a new wife from the same maternal lineage as his first wife suggests a concern to renew and remake kinship ties and memories in the home by replacing the mother the children had lost.

Mamadou's new wife (aged 30), whose first husband had died and who did not yet have children of her own, commented that she had felt under considerable social pressure to remarry following widowhood-mourning: *"If you don't get married, people will come every day, coming and going constantly, that's why I decided to get married. A man can come and tell you anything, so I said to myself, I'm going to get married to free myself from people".* In this instance, her relatively young age and the fact that she had not yet borne children herself, alongside Mamadou's explicitly articulated need for a wife to provide care for his children, are likely to have intensified social and religious imperatives to remarry. Marriage and child-bearing are considered vital events that signify young women's transition to adult social status in Senegal and other African countries, although such transitions are often non-linear (Johnson-Hanks, 2002).

Many participants' perspectives of remarriage were shaped by resource constraints, particularly for those with young children living in the city. Mariama, a middle-aged woman, was struggling to support six children in Guédiawaye and repay the debt she owed to her co-wife for her inherited share of the house. She expressed an interest in remarrying only if a husband would help to provide for the family, as an expression of respect, love and care. Indeed, some men were apprehensive about remarriage, given economic hardships and dominant gendered and religious norms of masculinity that men should be the main income earner supporting the household. Bachir (aged 40) who supported a large multigenerational household in Tocky Gare, commented: *"if you don't have the means, you have to content yourself with what you have and wait for a favourable moment to remarry".* Similarly, Modou, a retired man (aged 73) who lived with his second wife in Dakar and whose first wife had died in his natal village, did not wish to remarry and provide for a co-wife living elsewhere, despite his adult daughter proposing another wife: *"the second wife is there, that's enough for me. […] Life is too hard".*

For some, embodied relationality with the deceased made remarriage unthinkable in the near future. Some men delayed remarriage due to concern about potential conflict between a new wife and their children. Babacar (aged 45) explicitly related his delay in remarrying to his emotional state of mind, despite being acutely aware of the domestic burden placed on his daughter (aged 16):

> *"the state I'm in currently, I feel such pain that I don't notice these things straight away. Even if I understand that I should find another wife, as people tell me, I need to*

> *regain my serenity. Otherwise if you find another wife straight away, you risk having problems because you don't really believe in it".*

Continuing embodied relationality with the deceased could thus make it difficult for participants to develop emotional intimacy within a new relationship. This example refutes instrumentalist notions of men remarrying only because of practical, material benefits a wife might bring, in terms of a gendered home-making and caring role.

7. Conclusion

This research has revealed the diverse material, embodied and spatialised ways that the death of a spouse may be manifested in the experience of the living person, which are often explicitly gendered. The secluded time-space of widowhood-mourning represented a gendered, highly embodied, relational performance of mourning and material expression of continuing bonds in home space. Widows were expected to observe particular rituals in order to appease the dead, "purify" her body and "liberate" her from the former intimate ties that bound her (and her reproductive capacities) to her deceased husband. A heightened sense of relationality with the dead, thus, seemed to surround widows' bodies, which were regarded as having permeable boundaries that needed to be contained and "purified" in order to prevent misfortune and restore social cohesion after a death. This illustrates how processes of ritualisation operate as attempts to 'classify' and contain gendered material bodies and everyday inanimate objects that may otherwise be fetishized and deemed problematic due to their strong association with death and the deceased person (Hockey et al, 2005). It also supports understandings of love, grief and other emotional expressions, thoughts and

experiences as "relational performances", whose validity depends on time and place, emerging through a dynamic, constantly unfolding process of co-action that transforms each person, their relationship, places and spaces (Gergen, 2009).

Many men and women articulated the significance of the death of a spouse in terms of a loss of companionship, care and material support. Elements of "companionate marriage" (Wardlow and Hirsch, 2006) were invoked through emotional intimacy, shared history and companionship as life partners who had often been married for many years, sharing everyday hardships and family life in "houses of memory" (Carsten, 2004). In contrast to global shifts towards "modern companionate marriage", however, marriage was not seen as a project aimed towards "individual fulfilment and satisfaction" (Wardlow and Hirsh, 2006, p.5). Rather, it was viewed as a reciprocal project in which dominant gender ideologies and social reproduction continued to play a central role and emotional intimacy, care and material support were combined with communal objectives of strengthening kinship ties and meeting religious obligations. While married couples developed closely bonded relationships and companionship, the discourse of individuality was less evident among interviewees, the majority of whom experienced chronic poverty, compared to previous studies with women in middle-class settings in Dakar, where *interêt* (self-interest) may be more prominent (Hannaford and Foley, 2015). The discourse of the "bounded self" also appeared less pervasive, more generally, than in Minority world traditions (Gergen, 2009).

Furthermore, marital relations continued to be explicitly gendered, with distinct unequal social roles and expectations of a wife and husband which were viewed as complementary, in accordance with wider heteronormative and religious norms in Senegal. Women's expression

of the material dimensions of the loss can be read as signifiers of, and inseparable from, the emotional significance (Author et al, 2018; Hockey et al, 2005); material support was understood as an expression of a husband's love and care for the wellbeing of his wife and children (Durham, 2002). The home was associated with a wife's care and affection, evoking painful memories and a sense of presence in absence, which were bound up in gendered "mothering-as-home-making practices" (Jilek, 2020) and Serer cultural understandings of the home as a place of refuge for the maternal lineage that engendered a sense of belonging. The space of the home was thus transformed, sometimes unbearably, by the loss of a wife and mother, as well as transforming bereaved spouses' relational being-in-the-world.

Emotional attachment and the exchange of care and material support were thus intricately intertwined and produce intimate marital relations in particular material places and spaces that are bound up with gendered inequalities (Thomas and Cole, 2009). Alongside embodied relationality with the deceased, the social institution of marriage, religious and gender norms and the wider socio-economic environment presented an emotionally ambiguous, and often materially-constrained, horizon of possibilities for remarriage during such 'vital conjunctures' (Johnson-Hanks, 2002).

The paper demonstrates the value of gendered, spatial, relational analyses of love and loss in socio-spatial contexts that differ from dominant ideals of monogamous "love marriages' and assumptions about "grief" in the Minority world. Attending to the complex intertwining of materiality and emotion in particular places and spaces and seeking to understand the "permeability of embodied boundaries of relational being" (Ribbens McCarthy and Prokhovnik, 2014, p.37; Gergen, 2009) which encompass the living and the dead, can provide

deeper insights into relationality and intimacy in diverse contexts and make salient contributions to the burgeoning critical geographies of love and loss.

Notes

1. I use the terms, Majority and Minority Worlds in this article to refer to the global South and global North respectively, in order to acknowledge that the 'majority' of the world's population, poverty, land mass and so on are located in the global South.
2. The research was conducted during three months' study leave, following an initial scoping visit, and funded by University of Reading and Walker Institute for Climate System Research, 2011-2012.

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