

“Barcelona or the Hereafter”: Senegalese struggling with perilous journeys and perilous livelihoods.

*Roos Willems
IMMRC, Social and Cultural Anthropology
Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven*

Abstract

In 2006, the Spanish archipelago, the Canary Islands, saw the arrival of over thirty thousand clandestine migrants in pirogues that had departed mainly from somewhere along the Senegalese coast. The large majority of those who had risked their lives crossing the 1,500 kilometres of high seas were Senegalese nationals. Many were involuntarily repatriated. This paper traces back the historical context of these widely publicized endeavours in a Senegal that evolved from being a traditional immigration country to a place of emigration in barely twenty years. The repatriates' voices tell their stories from going to the Canary Islands to coming back. They explain why the many initiatives put into place to discourage them from future attempts of clandestine migration are not effective, and how the struggle to overcome their perilous livelihoods will continue.

Résumé

En 2006, plus de trente mille migrants clandestins sont arrivés en pirogues aux Iles de Canaries, l'archipel Espagnol, venant des côtes Sénégalaises. La majorité de ces gens, qui avaient mis en péril leurs vies dans la traversée des 1,500 kilomètres en haute mer, étaient d'origine sénégalaise. Beaucoup d'entre eux ont été refoulé vers le Sénégal. Cet article présente le contexte historique de ces voyages largement couverts par la presse internationale, et retrace l'évolution du Sénégal des vingt dernières années d'un pays d'immigration à un pays d'émigration. Les voix des rapatriés racontent comment ils sont allés aux Iles de Canaries pour revenir aussitôt. Ils expliquent pourquoi les initiatives mis sur pied pour les décourager de s'engager dans une émigration clandestine ne sont pas effectives, et comment ils vont faire pour faire face à leur survie fragile.

Keywords

Senegalese economic refugees – Canary Islands

Introduction

On the 18th of December 2006, the Senegalese daily *L'observateur* carried the story about a perilous journey ending in disaster.

102 “Fools of the sea” die, 25 fished out of the water – After 13 days of wandering in the high sea, a pirogue which sailed out of Ziguinchor filled to the brim with clandestine emigrants (127 in total) destined for the Canary Islands, was shipwrecked alongside the Langue de Barbarie, or more precisely near the village of Doune Baba Dièye, on December 16th, 2006. 25 of the passengers of this fortune seeking pirogue were fished out of the water on Saturday by local fishermen, but all the other 102 emigration candidates were declared missing, if not to say died in the high seas (Tall 2006:3).

This story did not even make the headlines appearing on page three of the newspaper.

During the year 2006, some 33,000 clandestine immigrants swept into the Canary Islands in pirogues that sailed out from different places along the West African coast. Many had departed from Senegal (St Louis, Kayar, Soumbédioune, Mbour, Ziguinchor, etc.) and around half were Senegalese nationals. The increasing number of West African pirogues arriving in the Canary Islands during the month of March made world headlines, and showed on TV5 and other international television channels. The result was a flood of new arrivals: around 23,000 in the second half of the year, compared to close to 10,000 in the first half of 2006. The month of September 2006 alone saw the arrival of over 7,500 clandestine migrants. Slowly, it emerged that many pirogues never made it across the 1,500 kilometres separating Senegal from the Spanish archipelago. Estimates of the ones perished at sea run in the thousands (Short 2007). From September 2006 onwards, at the request of the Senegalese authorities, over 4,600 Senegalese candidate immigrants, together with other nationalities that had departed from Senegalese soil, were repatriated by the planeload to St Louis.

In spite of numerous measures implemented to discourage the clandestine migration from West Africa into the Canary Islands, large numbers of men (and smaller numbers of women) continue to venture out into the seas to try their luck. The expression “Barça mba Barzakh” (Wolof^d for “Barcelona or the Hereafter”) translates well their determination to leave Senegal for a chance to a better life in Europe. This article intends to contextualize these highly sensational and widely publicized voyages by placing them in the larger historical background of the West African region, and more particularly of Senegal, the country that over half of the clandestine migrants hailed from. It will let some of the repatriated candidates immigrants speak for themselves in order to tell their story as well as to gauge at the motives of these young (and some not so young) Senegalese to risk the journey.² It will appear that while some have decided to never again repeat this experience, others are just as determined to try a second (or third) time. In light of these findings, the article will look into some of the current policies put into

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place by Senegal and Spain (and other European countries) to discourage the clandestine emigration. It ponders on the effectiveness of these initiatives in view of the realities of day-to-day life in Senegal and the ambitions of its (young) men (and women).

Senegal as immigration country

The history of the African continent is one of continuous migration. From the pre-colonial period onwards, countless stories on various forms of large scale migrations--promoted by trade, warfare, pastoralism, slaving, natural disasters or religious conquest--have been well represented in myths and legends of pre-colonial times. Some have suggested that this migration culture was the logical outcome of the rebellion of enterprising individuals against a strictly hierarchical political system in an under populated continent (Kopytoff 1987). Others have cited related practices of extensive land use and shifting cultivation as indicator of the population's mobility (Nkamleu and Manyong 2005). During the colonial period, different migration patterns emerged in West Africa basically following the establishment of centres of mineral, oil and industrial production. The interior savannas of countries such as Burkina Faso and Mali became important sources of migration labour for the plantations and domestic producers of crops such as cocoa and coffee in Ivory Coast and groundnuts in Senegal. These mobility patterns continued to exist well into the era of independence (Arthur 1991). The principal sending areas for emigrants, by decreasing order of importance, were Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, and Togo, together supplying almost 73% of the total foreign nationals in 1975 in countries such as Ivory Coast, Ghana and Senegal (Stier 1982 in Nkamleu 2006). In addition to these labour migration flows at the West African level, there were the more regional mobility patterns within the Senegambian region (which comprises 6 countries: Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Guinea-Conakry, Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania). The two major emigration areas at that level were Upper Guinea and the region around Kayes in Western Mali from where migration took place towards the capital cities of the countries as well as the groundnut and cotton producing areas of the region (Barry 1980 in Fall 2003:6).

The number of immigrants in Senegal doubled between 1960 and 2005--from 168,139 to 325,940--but their number as a percentage of the population decreased from 4.8 to 2.8% in the same period (UN 2006). The overwhelming majority of the current immigrants come from Senegal's neighbouring countries and the Gulf of Guinea. Each immigrant group can often be located in a number of specific niches in the labour market, especially in Dakar. Guineans (from Guinea-Conakry), for example, often work as fruit vendors or are traders of vegetables and charcoal. Large numbers also operate as clothes washers or bus and taxi drivers. Malians are renowned for their home dyed cloth, while Bissau-Guinean are known as house painters and domestic personnel. Gambian nationals, who are rarely considered 'real' foreigners, usually settle in the

Casamance region to the South of their home country. Mauritians (despite a short interval of absence due to the S n galo-Mauritania conflict of 1989) continue to make a living as jewellers and small shop owners. Capeverdians, who traditionally were very active on construction sites, are these days often found in the printing and computer business. Moroccans, Lebanese and French who make up about 15% of Senegal's immigrants are usually business men and women, and have been joined recently by increasing numbers of Chinese (Fall 2003: 5-9).

From the 1980s onwards, Senegal became an emigration rather than an immigration country in that the total numbers of emigrants started to increase at a much faster rate than the number of immigrants. Undoubtedly, the worsening economic situation following the draught of the mid 1970s and the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s were at the roots of this phenomenon. A recent EU study stated that:

the current Senegalese economy is characterised by a low level of private investments and low domestic savings, a situation that worsened during the years of structural adjustment in the 1980s. The grade of self-financing in effect diminished over the years. This means that investments largely depend on foreign sources and development assistance. This is in particular true for government investments. Local resources for public investments fell back to only 26% in 1994 to recover a bit in later years, but in general one could state that two thirds of public investments are paid by foreign aid (Hoebink et al. 2005: 63).

The degrading macro economic situation of the country had (and continues to have) a direct effect on the daily lives of ordinary Senegalese citizens at the micro level. If the average income of Senegalese citizens at the time of independence was comparable to that of South Korea (Molenaers and Renard 2006: 5), it has been dropping gradually ever since so as to become one of the lowest per capita incomes worldwide. In 1975, the Senegalese income per capita was still equal to 1/8 of the Spanish per capita income (Based on UNEP 2002). By 2004 however, the income gap between the two countries had doubled to factor 15 (Based on UNDP 2006). Senegal currently ranks 156/177 on the list of HDI per country, right after Mauritania and Haiti and right before Eritrea and Rwanda (UNDP 2006) and about one in every two households (48.5%) lives under the poverty line (ESAM-II 2004).

A reversal of trends

A first wave of Senegalese migrants found their way to France in the wake of the First World War via the transatlantic long haul maritime routes, and debarked in international harbours such as Marseille, Bordeaux, and Le Havre (Diarra 1968 in Fall 2003:16). The second wave of the Senegalese migrants into France (1945-1970) consisted largely of students, who would form the intellectual elite on the eve of independence (Fall 2003). From the 1970s onwards, France slowly became just one of a multitude of destination countries for Senegalese labour migrants, who by now were making up the bulk of Senegalese emigrants. Italy, in particular, received

increasing numbers of Senegalese immigrants during the 1980s.³ Up until the early 1990s however, only one third of Senegalese international migrants opted for a European destination, over two thirds (70%) preferring to remain on the African continent in countries such as Ivory Coast, Mauritania and Gabon. By 2000 preferences had changed and only 55% of new migrants went to another African country (preferably Gambia) while 40% choose to go to Europe (the remaining 5% going to the United States or one of the Arab countries) (Robin et al. 2000). Within Europe, France lost its status as the preferred destination country to Italy and Spain. If twenty years ago, 20% of international migrants still choose to go to France, today 33% opt for Italy, said to be “more tolerant towards Senegalese migrants” (EU 2006). The United States has also become a preferred country of destination, in particular for Senegalese migrants who have already made it to one of the Southern European countries (Robin et al. 2000).

Traditionally, international migration from Senegal took place mainly from the Senegal River Basin and consisted for the larger part of Soninké, Serer and Toucouleur. Since the 1980s however, the Dakar region and the Diourbel Region, more in particular the city of Touba (the Holy city of the Mouride Sufi order),⁴ have been providing over 40% of the international migrants (EU 2006). An estimated 6.5% of the population of Dakar and 8.8% of Touba inhabitants migrated abroad between 1988 and 1997 (Ammassari 2004). The ethnic composition of today’s migrants reflects roughly that of the general population: 46.7% Wolof, 28% Peul, and smaller groups of Serer (5.8%), Diolas (3.8%), Mandingues (3.4%) and Soninké (3.7%). Two in three (67.8%) of international migrants are between 15 and 34 years of age at the time of leaving Senegal, 46.3% is not married and only 16% are women (ESAM-II 2004). The urbanization rate for Senegal being 49.6% (UNDP 2006) and that of international migrants 52% reflects a slight preponderance of the urbanites⁵ among today’s emigrants contrary to the 1970s and 1980s. When disaggregating data by the country of destination, it appears that 75% of Dakar’s international migrants opt for Europe, Canada or the USA compared to only 39% of the rural international migrants (ESAM-II 2004).

Three quarters of the Senegalese who move to the European Union and the United States are motivated by economic reasons, whereas family reasons are considered more important when it comes to emigration to other African countries (Schoorl et al 2000). This difference in motivation to migrate translates well into the difference in tendency to send remittances. Whereas 55.7% of Senegalese migrants in Europe sends money home regularly (25.1% doing so irregularly), only 27.7% of migrants residing in another African country sends remittances on a regular basis (37.7% doing so on an irregular basis) (ESAM-II 2004). The World Bank’s estimates of total remittances through the formal banking system in 2001 were FCFA 127 billion. Taking into account the large number of informal systems to send money home, it has been suggested that this amount should be trebled to reflect the actual situation better (Jettinger

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2005). In other words, yearly remittances constitute close to 10% of the Senegalese gross domestic product. This means that an estimated 650,000 emigrants (EU 2007) contribute 10% to the GDP, while the whole of the agricultural sector employing 70% of Senegal's population (around 7 million men and women) contributes barely 15% (ANSD 2007). From this perspective, it is easy to understand why 34% of the national population between 18 and 65 years of age has the intention to emigrate (Robin 2000) and how a migrant culture has emerged.

Migrant culture

Modou-Moudou, a term initially used to designate the seasonal workers in the Senegalese peanut basin, has become since the 1990s the buzz word among the urban youth and is used today to describe their obsession with migrating overseas (Fall 2003:16). A 1997-98 survey on emigration motivations carried out in the urban area of Pikine (Dakar) and the semi-urban area around Touba, found that 50% of male respondents have intentions to move abroad and 26% of female respondents. The overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) quoted economic reasons for intending to migrate and stated in the following order their preferred destination country: the USA, Italy and France (van Dalen 2005:751-4). The study found social network effects as well as the effects of poverty to be virtually absent in the intention to migrate. Rather, the authors observed the existence of a migrant culture, in that “when you are old enough as man, you will go abroad” (NIDI/EUROSTAT 2001). Emigration pressure in Senegal was found to be quite high compared to some other African countries. Both “the expectations of financial gains associated with migration” and the “optimistic view of finding a job in the destination country” were identified as factors contributing heavily to the decision to emigrate (van Dalen 2005:775).

Another indication of a migrant culture in Senegal is the fact that increasingly difficult procedures for Senegalese citizens to obtain a visa to travel to one of the European countries do not seem to affect the intention to migrate. Everyone ‘knows’ that visas can be bought through intermediaries even if prices have increased sharply in recent years. The usual procedure is to pay half upfront to the middleman –one need not even go to the embassy oneself—and the other half is paid once the person has safely arrived by plane in the country of destination. One of the informants explained that:

the visa costs about 2 million francs⁶ [more than € 3,000]. One of my friends got one for 2.8 million [€ 4,275]. When you receive it, you pay half, and then when you reach Europe, you call your family and they will pay the other half.

Even if the first attempt does not succeed and huge sums of money are involved, the intention to migrate does not waver, as one 43 year old Dakar resident relates.

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Before 2000, I tried twice to go to Europe on a visa, but they robbed me. 800,000 one time and 1.5 million the other time ... It's the middlemen, you know. The second guy that nicked my money was the father of a friend. He was in that business and often succeeded ... We were eight to give him our money, but then he got into trouble. He was arrested and did six months in jail.

For those who do not succeed in obtaining a visa (and travel to Europe by plane) but still intend to migrate, there remains the option of one of the land routes across the Sahara. One route is from the Moroccan coast to Andalusia, a 14-kilometer (nine-mile) journey across a tightly monitored stretch of the Mediterranean. The second entails climbing security fences into Melilla and Ceuta, two Spanish enclaves on the Moroccan coast. These routes can easily take up to three months (or more⁷) and are dangerous, carrying a high risk of not making it alive through the desert in order to reach the Moroccan coast. Recently, the overland routes across Northern Africa have been progressively abandoned after security was tightened, not only around the Strait of Gibraltar in the Mediterranean but also around the Morocco based Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Mellila. The sea routes to the Canary Islands from Morocco and Mauritania are generations old, well established routes. However, due to increased police patrolling of the coastlines of Morocco and recently also of Mauritania, the clandestine migration routes to the Canary Islands have moved southward along the West African coast.

That sea route has been in use since the eighties already... it started in Nouadhibou in Mauritania ... but then in 2006, some fishermen from St Louis⁸ on their return from up there after the fishing season, they got wind of the route and tried it out themselves. After that it came down south up to Kayar and then Soumbédioune and so on ... From Mauritania, people took the route in a discrete manner, every now and then a pirogue, then another one. But here in Senegal once the news spread, everyone wanted to leave ... In the old days, there were no GPS. Those were great fishermen, they sailed with the stars. Even today from Morocco that's how they do it. You just pay 300,000 and they take you to the Canary Islands. There were Senegalese up there, who built the pirogues that took people to the Canaries. From there it takes only two days.

Before the existence of GPS, the sea routes from Morocco and Mauritania to the Canary Islands required experienced seamanship hence limiting the number of journeys that could take place in a certain period of time. In view of the fact that GPS technology had become affordable to large numbers of people and are relatively easy to use, it became feasible for larger numbers of people to undertake longer journeys from points of departure much further away. Yet, in addition to the existing migrant culture and the easily available technology, there were other factors at play in the run up to the 2006 events.

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The Canary Islands Experience

Between February and May 2005, Spain legalized between five to six hundred thousand illegal immigrants, among whom 30,000 Senegalese. Many of them called home to share the good news, and to encourage their friends to come to Spain, as one informant, 27 year old Samba, explained.

Others have taken the same route, they arrived and there working now. They're making good money, they succeeded. It is they who call us and tell us to come. If we had the visa of course, we wouldn't go by the sea. But you can look for the visa here for 4 years and still not get it. The first ones who went over there, it was the government that gave them jobs, they even gave them a place to sleep. Well, it's those guys who now tell us to that there is work and that we should come.

Finding a spot on a pirogue was not difficult as there were many entrepreneurs looking for clients, and the whole endeavour was fairly well planned.

The owner of the pirogue knew someone here in Soumbédioune. He asked him to look for customers ... Building a pirogue takes about two to three months. People sell their things, some sell their scooters, others sell the stuff they had in their rooms like TV sets, music chains and other things to raise money. The time they need to sell coincides with the building time of the pirogue. Once they get their fare together, and the works are completed, the passengers pay and get a ticket.

For most of the pirogue owners, return on investments is high and the risk nil.

The pirogue owner doesn't navigate him self, he takes a captain whom he pays 1 million. The programme for the trip you can buy at 1.2 million⁹. Then they also bought two GPS, each one at 500,000, so two makes 1 million. Then there are seven conductors, one for each day of the journey. They are not paid but in exchange they don't pay for the trip. So you can say that their salary is a free ticket to Spain. Only one person is paid and that is the captain ... he also is not planning on coming back. Whoever goes, doesn't come back, unless you're being brought back ... This means you can have 45 million because each passenger pays 500,000 and we had 90 passengers. You buy two engines, each engine is 2.5 million ... petrol 1.5 million. Then we also took 50 drums of water, each one containing 60 litres, four bags of rice, one sheep ... that makes at the most 1 million for the food ... and a new pirogue costs about 4 million.

Return on investment for the pirogue owners is at least 145%, because many do not leave as well prepared as the pirogue Samba travelled in. Even bribes for the police and prayers for good luck from the marabouts¹⁰ are included:

There was one policeman whom we gave money. [When we were about to embark] one policeman came down onto the beach, he saw the owner who gave him 50,000. So he left and 'blinded' the others by saying that there was no one down there ... Before the departure, the owner

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made good arrangements not only on the material side, but also on the side of religion. We had prayers and mystic rituals done by the marabouts that would protect the pirogue ... Before setting off, the marabouts look if the pirogue can depart, if the weather is favourable ... in this world nothing is for sure, even where we are sitting now something can fall on our heads, so you better look out well before undertaking something... We were told beforehand that there were many patrols but we didn't see any ... Even on the internet you can consult yourself the weather forecast sites in order to be sure the weather will be fine ... All those pirogues who didn't make it left without consulting the weather forecast and undergoing the mystic rituals.

Samba's pirogue which set off in September, made it in nine days.

We took nine days, we could have made it in six days, but one of the engines broke down, so we went slowly with the other one so that that one wouldn't brake down as well. The other pirogues arrived in six days, some even in five days ... The sea journey was difficult, but that's ok, because after all, it's a man's thing ... In the beginning its hard sitting up straight the whole time, but after four days you get used to it ... at night when you sleep you sometimes wake up drenched by the water, but then you just change your clothes and go back to sleep.

Other pirogues were not as fortunate. Sometimes because the captains lacked the required seafaring experience, others just had bad luck. Sidi, who tried his luck in May 2006, recalls:

We spent four days without food or water ... it took us thirteen days and the food we took with us was for nine days only ... You know, among the captains you have qualified people and not so qualified people. Some really know how to work with a GPS, but others don't. That's why sometimes you see people who make the journey in only five to six days ... but there are also those who don't have the required skills, who just grope their way along. That's why you see so many tragedies, people who get lost in the sea, who take fifteen to twenty days, who are tired, seasick, they throw up and then if you don't eat, you die. That's why there are too many dead ... We had an excellent captain, someone from St Louis, who knew the area, he'd worked on ships before, but there was the storm ... We lay still for about two days, the sea was so wild, that's why we didn't move for two days, and this was our bad luck. We even had medicines with us, you know ... We were well prepared, but there was the storm ... that was God's decision.

Sidi's pirogue was saved from a worse faith by the Moroccan Coast Guard. Of the 110 passengers, nine had died. He and his fellow passengers were repatriated by the Moroccan authorities to Dakar where they were taken into the care of the Senegalese Red Cross. From Sidi's testimony, it becomes clear that a minimum level of technical knowledge of the GPS system as well as some old fashioned seamanship and knowledge of currents and climatic changes will go a long way in reducing the risks of the long voyage. Unfortunately, the appeal of the high rate of return over investment for entrepreneurs and of the success stories of the

earlier arrivals to new emigration candidates was too strong. Many pirogues left less well prepared and met misfortune and death in the high seas. In November 2006, the Spanish Coast guard reported finding over 500 bodies in the waters around the Canary Islands (IRIN 2006a). Others sources report an estimated loss of 1,000 human beings along the West African coast during the second half of 2006 (Chislett 2006).¹¹ Too many families where one or more sons (sometimes daughters) embarked, have not heard from them or received news through others since many months (IRIN 2006b).

The “un”glorious return home

Throughout 2006 over 33,000 arrivals in the Canary Islands were recorded (Frontex 2007). For those who reached safely, the journey was not over yet.

When you arrive, they come to meet you. They ask whether there are no problems in the pirogue, whether there are no dead. Then they take you somewhere and give you new dry clothes. They keep you for three days at the police post to see if you're not sick and they ask you where you are from. After that they take you to the court to ask you all sorts of questions. In the court room we found some Senegalese who translated for us. So they asked us where we came from and why we came there. We said that we came from a country at war, but that we came to work ... We didn't say that we were Senegalese because of all the problems that Lai Wade¹² was causing with his declaration that all these young Senegalese should be repatriated.

After the first flight of Senegalese repatriates in May 2006, the Dakar government suspended repatriations from the Canary Islands, claiming Spain was not respecting international legislation in its treatment of Senegalese citizens. The repatriated invoked "treason" as they alleged to have been promised flights to continental Spain. A few months later however, the Senegalese president Wade signed an agreement with Spain and sent Senegalese police officers to help identify their compatriots to be repatriated. From September 2006 onwards, 4,600 Senegalese and migrants of other nationalities who had departed from Senegal, were sent back by plane to St Louis. In order to avoid being one of the repatriates, Samba tried to hide his nationality.

That's why we said we're not Senegalese. All of us had changed our story... We were about fifteen hundred in the camp, there were Gambians, Sierra Leoneans, Ivorians, Guineans, Malians, all came in the pirogues. Some had embarked from the Casamance region in southern Senegal, others from Soumbédioune or Kayar ... Among the camp guards were also a Guinean and a Gambian. They greeted us, and asked us our names, where our home was, in which neighbourhood we lived etc. They said they were asking for this information just so they could

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inform us should they find work for us. But they cheated us ... Everyday someone came with a list of names of those persons that they would bring to Spain. Our group of Senegalese, they cheated us. They called out our names, they said "Barcelona", they called out around 240 of us. Then they took the whole group to a restaurant, bought us breakfast, no doubt to put us at ease, and told us when we would leave. They cheated us.

Samba was repatriated in October 2006. When he arrived in St Louis he had € 50 in his pocket, given by the Spanish authorities upon departure, and received 10.000 FCFA on Senegalese side and a sandwich.

We arrived in St Louis at midday, it was really very, very hot ... There were guys that were crying like little children ... Once we got out of the place, the police officers who came with us on the flight insisted we leave the airport. They didn't want us to stay in groups and raise hell. So they took us to the buses to go to Dakar, to Tambacounda and to other places ... The coming home was hard ... everybody cried. My father said that it was not so bad, that it is a hardship that men go through. But it was my mother who couldn't stop crying, I felt so sorry for her ... You know, she had heard rumours of all the dead on the other pirogues and had been very worried. So, on the one hand she cried because she was relieved to see her son again alive and well. But on the other hand, with all the efforts I went through to go all the way to Spain, and that all they did was repatriate us ... she was crying out of anger against the government.

The general mood in Senegal at the time of repatriation was one of frustration with the Senegalese government, and more in particular with its president, Abdoulaye Wade, who had personally asked the Spanish authorities to repatriate the Senegalese clandestine migrants. Many of the repatriates recall persons of other nationalities whom they had known in the pirogues or in the camp, for example Gambians or even Malians who passed off as Gambians, and who had been admitted to Spain "because *their* president had said he didn't want his nationals sent back". In addition, Samba together with many other repatriates, is convinced that:

When we were sent back, the Spanish didn't want us to leave and go back to Senegal. They need manpower in their country, and that is why they didn't want the Senegalese to go back. It is our president who insisted we be repatriated.

Policies and Programs

Over the past years, quite a few programs and initiatives to curb the increasing emigration rates and the related 'brain drain' from the West African region have seen the light.¹³ However, given the massive numbers of arrivals in the Canary Island in the space of only a couple of months, a number of separate measures, other than the forced repatriation, were taken to deal with the situation.

A first initiative came from the arrival side with the deployment of European experts to the Canary Islands to support the Spanish authorities in the identification of the migrants and the establishment of their countries of origin. This module, called Hera I, was organized by Frontex¹⁴ and ran until end of October 2006. In the second module--a joint surveillance operation called Hera II, which lasted from August till mid December--technical border surveillance equipment was increased so as to enhance the control of the area between the West African coast and the Canary Islands in order to "divert the vessels using this migration route" (Frontex 2007). In December 2006, an agreement was signed between Spain and Senegal for the prolongation of these measures for six months. Hera III consists of two modules. On the one hand there are the interviews with illegal migrants who have arrived to the Canary Islands in order to establish how these crossings are being facilitated. According to Frontex, similar information gathered during Hera I had already enabled to detain several facilitators mainly in Senegal. On the other hand there is the continuation of joint patrols by aerial and naval means of a number of European countries along the coast of West Africa. In order to strengthen its coastal patrol capacities, Spain offered two frigates to Senegal, which is the base of the joint Frontex patrol scheme. Between July and December 2006, 3,887 clandestine emigrants were intercepted and diverted close to the West African coast (Ibid.). Comparing the statistics, this means that for every person intercepted, ten made it safely to the Canary Islands.

In December 2006, Spain agreed to grant temporary work visas to 4,000 young Senegalese by the end of 2008 as part of a common programme to tackle irregular migration of Africans to Europe. "This makes possible the emigration of Senegalese under a legal framework through our Labour Ministry and the job market. Happily, we are in need of labourers," the Spanish Prime Minister was reported to have announced during his visit to Dakar in December 2006 (International Herald Tribune, December 5th, 2006). At the same time, Spain confirmed its promise to give €20 million to Senegal to fund programmes to increase job training and economic opportunities for youth in farming. The REVA plan (*Retour vers l'Agriculture* – Return to Agriculture) was initiated only a few days after a first group of 99 Senegalese had been repatriated in May 2006. It was designed to (re)integrate the young repatriates into rural life by allocating around 100 ha in each of Senegal's 11 regions to a group of repatriates and other rural unemployed youth and providing them with technical assistance. In the other

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initiative financed by Spain, the ONFP (*l'Office National à la Formation Professionnelle* – The National Office for Vocational Training) received financial support in order to cater for job training programmes for repatriates in, for example, masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electricity, etc. The same programmes are also accessible to untrained unemployed youth who wish to acquire professional skills. After a training of around 400 hours, a limited number of them are to be given an employment contract of a limited duration with a Spanish company and a visa for Spain.

Another type of initiatives has been forthcoming from the civil society in Senegal and abroad. A number of local associations were founded with the aim to engage in discussions with would-be emigrants in order to discourage them from travelling to Europe. One example is the *Association des femmes dans la lutte contre l'émigration clandestine* (Women's Association in the Fight against Clandestine Emigration) founded by the mothers of disappeared (and suspected drowned) young men in Thiaroye-sur-Mer, one of the major centres of out-migration in the suburbs of Dakar. The group has the support of the Spanish Red Cross and organises meetings where local religious leaders come to denounce embarking for Spain in pirogues as suicidal. Suicide is considered one of the gravest of sins in Islam. In a campaign to highlight to a larger public the harsh reality of life in Europe for clandestine migrants, the local Red Cross works together with Thiaroye's women's group, traditional fighters and football players (IRIN 2006b). In Belgium, Woestijnvis¹⁵ has recently produced a documentary in collaboration with a Guinean immigrant, on what life is like for African immigrants in Flanders. The production house is currently seeking to have this documentary distributed among Senegalese candidate emigrants through schools and organizations for young people. By showing them that "Europe is not paradise," they hope to encourage significant numbers of them to stay in Senegal.¹⁶

Results and Impacts

Are these initiatives having any effects? What has changed since TV5 showed pirogue after pirogue of candidate migrants washing upon the shores of the Canary Islands during the spring of 2006?

During the month of May 2006, following the commencement of the Hera programme, two major arrests were made in Senegal comprising in total 1,535 clandestine migrants (including 5 Guineans) and 64 traffickers (AFP 2006a; 2006b). However, Frontex's mission to "dismantle migrant trafficking networks" finds little resonance in Senegal. The local perception is that the "traffickers" are more often than not ordinary fishermen who, due to the deteriorating situation of the fish grounds off the Senegalese coast, are no longer able to eke out a descent living by fishing alone. Looking for additional sources of income, they have turned their assets (large size pirogues) towards alternative uses. In doing so, they take advantage of the desperate situation of

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many of their compatriots, quite a few of whom are fellow fishermen also no longer able to make ends meet.¹⁷ One of them, who attempted to reach the Canary Islands in May 2006, described the situation of the Senegalese fish sector as follows.

These days there is no more fish left in Senegal ... Some fishermen go all the way up to Mauritania and the Cape Verde Islands, but to fish there, they need to buy licenses of up to 1 million FCFA for one year so they can catch those big fish that you can no longer find in Senegal ... Up until 2000 to 2001, fishing provided a good living, not any more ... Now for example there are these people who use dynamite, harpoons, big nets ... all of that is against the law, because it kills too much fish, but people do it anyway ...

Since May 2006, only one arrest of a pirogue owner, his middleman and eight clandestine migrants in Mbour was mentioned in the local press (*Le Quotidien Sud*, 2 March, 2007).¹⁸ Informants presumed the pirogue owner had refused to share his profits with the police force (as do others), hence the arrests. People appear to be well-informed of the two year prison sentence for pirogue owners and the six month sentence for illegal emigrants when caught red handed and the increased coastal patrolling. Neither, however, seems to deter candidate migrants from embarking in a pirogue because

up until now people are leaving, but they do so invisibly. The coast guard cannot see them thanks to mystical means¹⁹ ... Even with the helicopters and all, they cannot close off the sea because « the sea is a world » ... If someone gets arrested it is because they can see him. But if they cannot see him, they cannot arrest him.

There obviously exists a strong belief that magical means suffice to circumvent the increased surveillance by making the pirogues invisible. In addition, because ‘the surface of the sea is even larger than the surface of all the land on earth’ (“the sea is a world”²⁰), it is said to be impossible that human means can control everything that happens at sea. Frontex’s 2006 statistics show that for every clandestine migrant intercepted along the West African coast, ten made it safely to the Canary Islands (Based on Frontex 2007).

Already before the implementation of the REVA (Return to Agriculture) plan, there was a lot of scepticism as it slowly emerged that the majority of the candidate emigrants did not come from a rural background. According to young Samba who has a job at a fish trading company:

The REVA plan stinks (*c’est nul*) because we are not farmers. We, here in Dakar, we have our own profession.

Newspaper articles also reported how some repatriates, who did have a rural background, had unrealistic expectations such as tractors and other heavy equipment allegedly promised to them upon arrival at the airport in Dakar (Mboungou 2006). Others still, rightly argued that there was little future in agricultural activities given the current state of affairs of the agricultural sector, a consequence of, amongst others, years of neglect from the Senegalese government (IRIN 2006a).²¹ Even as 70% of the population of Senegal works in the agricultural sector, it

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contributes to barely 15% of the gross domestic product (ANSD 2007). Remittances from overseas, on the other hand, with an estimated 6% of the population emigrated, account for an amount equivalent to 10% of the GNP. Since its inception in September 2006, very little has been heard again of the REVA, except during the election campaign when it was again promoted by the party of the Senegalese president as *the* miracle answer to stop clandestine emigrants.²² According to informants, no-one they knew had ever considered subscribing to the REVA plan.

The first group of persons to have completed the 400 hours vocational training at the ONFP, left for Spain at the end of January 2007 (Thiam 2007a). The 75 young men, who received an employment contract (including social security) and a visa for periods from six months to two years, included 50 repatriates.²³ The Spanish Minister of Labour, when he was on visit in Dakar to sign the official agreement, announced that 700 visas are foreseen for the months March and April 2007 and over 4,000 by the end of the year 2007.²⁴ There is however a cut off age in that only Senegalese between 20 and 35 years of age are eligible. At the same time, there are different sources mentioning different quota for the repatriates in the allocation of the Spanish visas varying between 25 and 100% (Personal communication). Notwithstanding, the programme has been positively welcomed by the organization representing the repatriates (Thiam 2007b). When registering his own name on the list, which is managed by the Senegalese Red Cross, Samba was told ‘off the record’ that *all* Senegalese repatriates will be given priority over other candidates. Those with a profession, like him, were said not to be required to follow the 400 hours vocational training. In short, while the 4,000 visas are evidently extremely welcomed, there appears to be some confusion on the allocation criteria in terms of repatriation status and training received.

The € 20 millions that Spain promised Senegal to help with the clandestine migration, on the other hand, continue to raise a lot of dust, particularly during the presidential elections campaign of February 2007. Numerous were the occasions where crowds of youth have demanded to know where the money is that they were promised. According to some of the repatriates:

the people from the European Union who came to visit us in the camps, told us that each repatriated person should receive 6 million FCFA (around € 10,000) upon return ... Because we had a phone in the camp, we already knew from those who had been repatriated that all they got was 10,000 F and a sandwich, and we told them so ... “That’s impossible”, they said, “because we gave your president the funds to give you this money upon return so that you can work with it and no longer will keep on coming back here”.

The Senegalese president on the other hand asserted that:

the Senegalese government never received this money from Spain for the Senegalese repatriates ... “This is only a ruse, invented by the opposition ... You’re being told lies”, the president told a

crowd of young people gathered in protest against the repatriation of the clandestine emigrants (Le Soleil, 9 Feb 2007).

It is clear that confusion reigns and frustrations are growing, particularly among the repatriated migrants, as this would unfortunately not be the first time that the current regime is publicly suspected of withholding development money for private purposes.

Initiatives designed to convince candidate migrants that life in Europe can be difficult, met with the following arguments when presented to one of the informants:

When you are looking for money, you need some good luck as well, and that is God who decides. There are persons who left for Europe ten years ago and they still have nothing. Others left for a short while and came back already with enough to settle and live well. If the Senegalese continue to go to Europe, it is because it is better there than here ... Europe, it is good luck that you need. If you are lucky and you can go, you go. If you don't have a profession, yes, that makes it more difficult. Those guys, they don't know anything so they go sell in the streets, because they don't have any professional skills. But if you have a profession, like me, then you might make it, you just need some good luck.

Even the mothers in Thiaroye, who set up an association to fight against the clandestine emigration, are ultimately convinced that there is no other way to escape poverty (IRIN 2006b). Others still argue that films intending to dissuade African men and women from going to Europe will not have the desired effect in that:

what people go through in everyday life here in Senegal is 52,000 times worse than what might possible happen to them elsewhere ...

From the above reactions to proposed and implemented programs and projects aiming to curb the illegal emigration flows to the Canary Islands and further onwards to Europe, it appears that nothing --other than legal Spanish visas for which there evidently can be only a limited number of beneficiaries-- will persuade these Senegalese young men²⁵ not to engage in clandestine migration. In addition, statistics show that over half of the 33,000 arrivals in the Canary Islands were of Senegalese origin and yet only 4,600 of them were repatriated. A simple deduction leads to the conclusion that over 10,000 Senegalese actually succeeded in staying in Europe. In other words, despite all the adversities, there is a fair chance of success for Senegal's clandestine migrants to reach their goal.

Development economics or socio-cultural logics?

A lot has been written about the interrelationships between international migration and the development of the emigration countries.²⁶ International migration, from the African continent in particular, is said to have both positive and negative implications for the development of the sending countries.

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International migration impacts development in Africa in a wide range of ways, such as loss of human capital, remittances ---migradollars --- and skills acquisition. Also, African countries, already facing serious human resources shortage, have to learn to cope with yet another challenge: skills migration or 'brain drain' (ECA 2006: ix).

The 'brain drain' has had the same effect in Senegal as in many other African countries, namely the depletion of scarce talent and skilled resources through international migration (Dia 2005). Evidence shows that the loss of skilled labour is much higher now than it was several decades ago: in 2000, already 24.1% of Senegal's skilled labour had migrated compared to only 11.1% in 1990 (ECA 2006: 30). The presupposed 'brain gain'—i.e., the emigration country's increase in human, financial and social capital upon the return of the international migrant, hence stimulating its development-- is hampered by the lack of employment prospects and commensurate remuneration for the candidate returnees (EU 2006). Another important argument in favour of the positive contribution international migration has to offer to the emigration countries' development is the flow of remittances, which in the case of Senegal is estimated to be as high as 10% of the gross domestic product. A recent study shows that the larger part of remittances sent home by Senegalese migrants in Europe (97%) is used to pay for household expenses such as food, school fees, clothes, consumption goods, health related expenses and religious and social events, leaving only 3% for economic investments. Because remittances are sent on a much more regular basis than was the case a decade ago, the authors suggest that this money flow creates an attitude of dependence rather than stimulating economic growth (Dione et Lalou 2005). Clearly, the long term macro economic effects of international migration on the development of the home country are not unambiguous, even if there is an undisputed positive short term contribution to the survival of the household at micro level.

Looking at the development – international migration issue from another angle, many have suggested that an increase in development aid to Senegal (as one country among many) would solve the problem of clandestine migration, particularly in view of the events of 2006. This argument is directly in line with one of the principal economic arguments of the World Bank and of many other large donor organizations. It proposes that in countries with well working democratic institutions (also called 'good governance' countries), increased development aid will automatically and directly lead to a betterment of the lives of its populations. Senegal, however, has one of the highest rates of aid per capita of West Africa, and yet, the living conditions of large strata of its population have not significantly improved in recent years. According to a recent study socio-economic development in Senegal is stagnant in spite of large amounts of development aid, because of its particular political configuration that is based on religious structures and socio-cultural values and that prevents economic aid from reaching the micro-level (Molenaers and Renard 2006). Somewhat along the same lines, it was found that

recent initiatives by the French and Italian government to stimulate ‘translocal development’ through financing small local businesses in Senegal run by returned migrants “failed either partly or completely because the political, social and cultural context had not been taken fully into account” (Jettinger 2005: 13). When listening more closely to the motivations expressed by the candidate migrants or the analyses of persons working closely with them, there emerges a particular argument that, in spite of its apparent economic nature, has a distinct socio-cultural logic attached to it. When asked whether increasing development aid may provide the solution to clandestine migration, a responsible of the Senegalese Red Cross replied:

Not in the short term, perhaps in the long term ... The problem is that even people, who have a decent life here, want to leave Senegal. Most of them don’t think the quality of life in Europe is better than here. But they leave with the goal of putting aside a sum of money which will allow them to come back and lead a more dignified life at home. As long as their country cannot offer them that, immigration to Europe will continue” (IRIN 2006b).

Samba, who works in a fish factory and who took up his old job after being repatriated from the Canary Islands, explains that

What I make now, it’s not much because I share with my family. But it’s not sufficient because I cannot save ... If I were to have a little capital when I return from Europe, I could buy a little house for my mother, I’d put up a little business that can make money for me.

When digging deeper into why it is so difficult to put aside some money, a problem cited not only by persons with lower salaries but apparently also by those who make “a decent living” another informant explains as follows.

It doesn’t even have to be in Europe, even in another African country you can live better than in your own country ... You can save a little, for example if you make 10,000, you can keep 7,000 and eat only 3,000. But at home you cannot do that ... because your mother is there, your sisters, your brothers-in-law who don’t have a job. And we help each other. You cannot just watch a person without a job but who has a family, when you have 5,000 in your pocket. You cannot not share ... You have to help them when you have something yourself ... When you’re here you cannot manage your income as you wish. Your relatives know where you are and when you have some money, they’ll come looking to ask and you cannot refuse ... But if you are in Europe, you get your wages, you take some of it and send it home to your family, there will still be something left because you’re not sending all of it ... If you do that here, keep some of your money for yourself and for example put it in the bank ... people will call you ‘bad’ and they’ll consider you a heartless person ... nobody will come visit you ... and nobody will help you when you are the one in need of money.

The socio-cultural pressure to share all of one's (meagre or not so meagre) resources with others is enormous. Not respecting this will most surely lead to social exclusion and the foregoing of a social safety net in case of need. Outside of the socio-cultural group however, usually the extended family, some of the most pressing obligations may be escaped from for the price of a fixed monthly contribution that one can more or less decide on oneself. Hence, the international migrant enjoys a certain level of financial freedom without running the risk of social exclusion. On the contrary, he or she will enjoy *and* the revered socio-cultural status of a returned migrant *and* a certain level of economic independence. At least, these are the expectations of the clandestine migrants who embarked on the pirogues from Senegal to the Canary Islands in 2006.

Conclusion

This paper set out to contextualize the widely publicized arrivals of thousands of West African illegal emigrants in the Spanish archipelago of Gran Canaria in 2006, and to uncover the motivations of these young men and women to engage in so perilous a journey. It outlined the history of Senegal as one of the major immigration countries in the West African region until the advent of the adverse climatic circumstances of the 1970s and the harsh consequences of the structural adjustments programs of the 1980s. The steadily increasing rates of emigration over the past decades have given rise to a migrant culture, particularly but not exclusively in urban areas. The closure of the traditional clandestine migration routes over land together with the proliferation of modern transportation technology (GPS) and instant information flows (via cable TV and GSM) shaped the background of the massive departures of 2006. It is true that some never reached the Canary Islands and that others, who had arrived safely, were (unvoluntarily) repatriated. But statistics show that over 10,000 of the Senegalese arrivals were never repatriated, suggesting a reasonably high rate of success. Most of the initiatives undertaken to discourage both repatriates and other candidate migrants from engaging in clandestine migration are quite clearly not effective. Evidently, Spain's publicly declaring its need for more immigrant labour is not conducive either. This article concurs with a 2006 ECA study in that

a large proportion of migration is clearly related to the strive for economic betterment [but] economic disparities are not enough to explain international movement ...[P]erceptions of the situation in the receiving country, as well as the policies and legislation that enable or complicate movement, play a very important role as well in shaping migratory streams (ECA 2006: 9).

However, the findings of this paper suggest that socio-cultural logics can also play an important role in the decision to migrate, particularly where certain socio-cultural values exert a possible

hampering effect on the economic self determination of individual men and women in an environment of scarce economic resources.²⁷

The pressure to seek another life outside of Senegal is unlikely to decrease in the near future, not in the least because an estimated 60% of the population is younger than 16 years of age. One of the informants told the following story with apparent relish.²⁸

You know, these guys who tried to take a boat all the way to the United States, well they're in New Jersey now ... They left from here, I know them all, they are my younger brothers ... No, they didn't go in a pirogue, they took a catamaran and installed two Mercedes engines ... They're mechanics, you know, they are from here, from the Gueule Tapée and they prepared their own boat ... They counted on 25 to 30 days, but it took them 46 days in all. They ran into a storm at about 1,000 kms from the US coast, luckily they were intercepted ... They've been in New Jersey for about a week now. They left from Mbour, they worked in Saly you know. They reworked two Mercedes engines and got the boat from a friend. Then each one of them contributed 750,000F to buy petrol, food. They're a gang of old friends ... They didn't have a choice really, life is shit here in Dakar, *c'est la galère* ...

These young men are currently held in high regard on the streets of the Gueule Tapée, and will undoubtedly inspire others to follow the same route, despite the odds.

Notes

¹ Wolof is the most widely spoken language in Senegal.

² Interviews were held with residents of the Gueule Tapée, a populous neighbourhood only a few kilometres away from high rise Dakar city centre but right next to Soumbédioune, a fishing port where numerous pirogues embarked from, direction Canary Islands.

³ Italy became a country of destination for significant numbers of immigrants from the late 1970s onwards when other countries such as Britain, France and Germany began to close their borders in response to the economic downturn. Although many of the migrants arriving in Italy still intended to travel onwards to other wealthier European states with more-established migrant communities, more of them remained in Italy because it was difficult for them to move further north (Schuster 2005).

⁴ The particular characteristics of the Mouride migrant networks and organizations have been extensively documented in the literature (see for example Tall 1998, Fall, Gueye and Tall 2000, Riccio 2006).

⁵ Particularly from Dakar (31%) and St Louis (18%) (ESAM-II 2004)

⁶ The current rate of exchange is 655 FCFA for 1 €, and around 500 FCFA for 1 US\$.

⁷ See for example "An African Odyssey: John Ampan's Four-Year Journey from Ghana to Europe" in Der Spiegel, 01/26/2007. Internet: <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,462085,00.html>

⁸ St Louis is a major fishing port in Senegal, near the border with Mauritania.

⁹ It appeared that someone was selling the exact longitude and latitude coordinates of the islands for good money.

¹⁰ A marabout is a personal spiritual leader in the Islam faith as practiced in West Africa. The marabout is often a scholar of the Qur'an, and many make amulets for good luck, preside at various ceremonies, and in some cases actively guide the life of the follower.

¹¹ Others still speak of several thousands of African migrants drowned (Short 2007). It remains unclear in how far these reports are substantiated.

¹² Laye Wade is a nickname for the president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade.

¹³ There are amongst others “*L’Observatoire des Migrations Internationales en Afrique de l’Ouest*” by IOM and IRD, the Seahorse project by the EU, the CODEV project by Senegal and France, the COOPI project financed by the EU and implemented by the CeSPI in Rome, and the MIDEF project co-financed by the EU and the Catalan Fond. These regional projects joined other international programs such as the TOKTEN project which is UNDP funded and running since around 20 years in 30 countries, and the MIDA programme which is run by IOM (EU 2006).

¹⁴ Frontex is “the EU agency based in Warsaw, was created as a specialised and independent body tasked to coordinate the operational cooperation between Member States in the field of border security” (Frontex 2007)

¹⁵ Woestijnvis is a Belgian film production house which produces amongst others programs such as “Man bijt hond”.

¹⁶ Personal communication by Steven Crombé from Woestijnvis in February 2007.

¹⁷ According to a recent EU report one out of every six active Senegalese “*tries to earn his money in fisheries*” (Hoebink et al. 2005: 72)

¹⁸ The only other case of arrest for trafficking mentioned in the Senegalese press dates back to March 2006, in other words *before* the commencement of the HERA programme.

¹⁹ Which may consist of a few drops of a magical potion sprinkled around the pirogue, or another magical object that is carried along in the pirogue. Only certain marabouts can prepare magical liquids and/or objects invoking invisibility. It is said not to be expensive, however, one has to be wary of charlatans (Personal communication).

²⁰ “Geej àdduna la” in Wolof.

²¹ A 2005 EU report pointed out that if the Senegalese government would have seen agriculture as a priority area and if the Ministry of Agriculture would have had a strong position, agriculture would have been integrated in the domains of the 9th EDF. In the report European officials indicate that “a large amount of former Stabex funds is still lying idle, because of little action from the side of the Senegalese government and the absence of a policy plan for agriculture” (Hoebink et al. 2005: 64).

²² Senegal held presidential elections on February 25th, 2007.

²³ This was a personal communication from a member of the selection committee.

²⁴ According to El Pais, the Spanish daily, immigrants are indispensable for the growth of the country in that “migrants have invigorated the Spanish economy to the extent that they have contributed 50 percent of GDP growth since 2001” (in Short 2007).

²⁵ Even as there were only few women who embarked on the pirogues leaving from Soumbédioune, the author was not able to persuade one of them to be interviewed for the purpose of this article.

²⁶ The effects of international migration on the development of the immigration countries are equally important but fall outside the scope of this paper.

²⁷ Other socio-cultural logics such as the gerontocracy and the kleptocracy that dominate the current Senegalese political and economic landscape were occasionally brushed upon by informants as hampering the advancement of individual men and women.

²⁸ The story turned out to be true (Usborne 2007), but was not widely covered in the local press.

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During the 1990s, **Roos Willems** (Ph.D. 2003, U. of Florida) worked for over six years with refugee and migrant organizations, such as the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in both East and West Africa. Currently affiliated with the Migration and Intercultural Studies Center at the Catholic University of Leuven, she works in Senegal as the Representative of the NGO "Vredeseilanden". Email address: rooswillems_2000@yahoo.com