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## Victims of their Fantasies or Heroes for a Day?

Media Representations, Local History and Daily Narratives on Boat Migrations from Senegal

*Victimes de leurs rêveries ou héros d'un jour ? Représentations médiatiques, histoire locale et récits quotidiens sur les migrations piroguières du Sénégal*

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## Victims of their Fantasies or Heroes for a Day?

### Media Representations, Local History and Daily Narratives on Boat Migrations from Senegal\*

This is one of the questions which, since the winter of 2005, has caught, more or less explicitly, the interest of Senegalese newspapers and magazines, driving to the production of several newspaper articles and photographic reportages on the phenomenon of “boat migrations” or *migrations piroguières* (*gaalu looco* or *mbëkkmi* in Wolof)<sup>1</sup>.

When talking about “boat migrations” we refer to the phenomenon that involved thousands of Senegalese and other people coming, from Western African countries, predominantly male, who set off for the Spanish archipelago of the Canary Islands from the Senegalese, Mauritanian or Gambian coasts. They risk their lives to “*gagner l’Europe*” (Cesti 2007; Mbow & Tamba 2007; Diop 2008). Many of them, without any regular expatriation document for Europe, have been forcibly repatriated, following forty days of detention.

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1. Field research was conducted in 2009, in the urban areas Thiaroye-sur-Mer, M’bour and Saly. In addition to field notes and the collection of academic and statistical documentations, I undertook participant observation in public places (streets, squares, markets and beaches, when participating in cultural and religious events) and in private ones (houses of migrants, relatives and neighbours); the main core of the research consists in informal conversations and semi-structured interviews.

PICTURE 1. — ROUTES TO CANARY ISLANDS FROM AFRICA

(Hernández Carretero 2008)

During the last few years, the phenomenon of *migrations piroguières* has fuelled a remarkable cultural production of images, discourses, songs and public representations around their protagonists (Bouilly 2008; Ludl 2008). The analytical horizon of the mass-media on this phenomenon has shown to be rather biased due to the assumption of a univocal perspective: from the point of view of the countries of destination. This approach perpetuates a prevailing rhetoric which portrays the “candidate to migration” as “kamikaze” (Soudan 2007: 22; Ndiaye 2008), as victims (Hernández Carretero 2008) or as “naive adventurers” (Bredeloup 2008).

In many journalistic articles the definition of the pirogue emigrant as “clandestine” seems to be applied improperly because it is used in reference to people, most of whom have still not undertaken their migratory travel, often stopped at the boarding. Moreover, based on the present international legislation, if the “clandestine” individual is only someone who falls into a condition of non-regularity due to his “attempt to migrate”, this definition

does not allow a proper distinction between the person and his status (Dal Lago 1999). The majority of the so-called “pirogue emigrants” are young people whose label as “clandestine” is mainly based on “a will or an aspiration to migrate” rather than on the basis of a *fait accompli*. It seems inappropriate and disputable to label as “clandestine” people who are often still in the home waters. The distinction between “clandestine” or otherwise is framed within a blurred discursive and practical dimension.

The mass media and the official discourses often tend to reproduce a form of “state mentality” (*“pensée d’État”*) through which the western nation-states “think” immigration (Sayad 1999: 399). The migrants are largely described as individuals who are driven to leave by their courage and deprivation. They would be swayed by the boasting behaviour of the returning immigrants (Schmitz 2008), as well as by the “imagination” of an idyllic European “elsewhere”. According to this economic deterministic perspective, contemporary African migrations towards Europe are assumed to be an extraordinary phenomenon (Wallerstein 1974), the taxonomic result of “push and pull” factors. The role of individual and collective *agency* of the social actors is ignored, and the “propensity to migrate” is often understood as the mechanistic result of “underdevelopment” and “poverty”.

Trying to go beyond this approach and to answer the initial question, the analytical perspective on “mobility” that M. De Bruijn *et al.* (2001) put forward in order to study the migration processes in Africa, has turned out to be particularly fruitful<sup>2</sup>. M. De Bruijn (2007: 110) avoids the traps of the “sedentarist metaphysics” (Malkki 1992) observing that for millions of Africans “being mobile” is not an exception but rather a “way of life”. “Mobilities and travelling cultures are of old Sahelian histories and of the new Sahelian world” inasmuch as “mobility is engrained in the history, daily life and experiences of the population” (De Bruijn *et al.* 2001: 1).

Mobility of people could be seen as a “way of life” in Senegalese society. Hence, far from being an exception to sedentariness, “something anomalous carrying a negative connotation”, the Senegalese migrations should be rather understood as a phase of continuity within a “culture of mobility” (Tarrius 1993).

In addition, R. van Dijk *et al.* (2001: 9) maintains that mobility, in a broader sense, implies more than just movement of people from A to B in geographical space alone; it also refers to “non-human and non-material things such as ideas and values, representations which can move or adopt specific forms as a result of the movement of people”. Thus, the understanding of the migratory processes should be tied to the analysis of a set of “cultural representations” (Cohen 2004: 26) historically generated by the actions of

2. The greater attention devoted to the meanings and social practices that inform the concept of “mobility” rather than “migration” is the starting point to broaden the view on the study of those who do not migrate, avoiding the assumption of migrants as the exclusive analytical object.

migrants and by the relationship they establish with “those left behind” and the fellow travellers<sup>3</sup>.

How is “mobility” experienced and described by Senegalese people? Starting from this question the aim of the paper is to develop a different understanding of the pirogue migrations retracing the individual, collective and historical dynamics which inform the construction of the migratory dimension among migrants and non-migrants in some Senegalese urban areas or, in other words, from the point of view of the country of origin: “the other side of migration” (Riccio & Lagomarsino 2010; Bellagamba 2011). The paper argues that the phenomenon of pirogue migrations could be better understood by exploring the manifold forms of social representations/self-representations of “migrant” which circulate within Senegalese society (Riccio 2005). Moreover, specific attention will also be devoted to the meanings conveyed by both Senegalese mass-media<sup>4</sup> and by the narratives of migrants and non-migrants (Horsti 2008).

Drawing from the findings of an ethnographic research in the peripheries of Dakar and in the urban areas of M'bour-Saly, we will carry out the analysis and comparison between the iconographical documents and articles of some Senegalese newspapers and periodicals, on the one hand, and the daily “pedestrian rhetoric” (de Certeau 1984) of students, shopkeepers, taximen, returning migrants, repatriated migrants from the Canary Islands, as well as their relatives and neighbourhood friends. This approach will allow us to highlight how the study of the “social construction of migrant” emerges as a fertile soil to deconstruct macro-analytical interpretations, and to question the official rhetoric on “clandestine migrations” from Senegal.

In the first part of the article, the presentation of the social actors around whom the organization of the pirogue travel revolves, is followed by a section that deepens the historical and local dimension of pirogue migrations within the social context of the Lébou fishermen of M'bour. The diachronic approach to the migratory processes will allow us to track down the locally specific “culture of migration” (Hahn & Klute 2007; degli Uberti n.d.) and how it is rooted in the social practices and meanings that people attribute to their professional activities.

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3. Looking at the individual and collective dynamics which are tied to the choice of migrating within the Mexican society, J. COHEN (2004) maintains, as well as P. HAHN and G. GLUTE (2007) in the African context, that studying “the cultures of migration” means exploring through an historical perspective, the internal logics of migration, grasping and describing not only the migrations but also the interactions among individuals in the social context where they originated.
  4. The accounts here considered cover a period from May 2006 to October 2009 and are drawn from: *Le Quotidien* (*Le Q*, private journal, critical on the governmental activities), *Le Soleil* (the journal generally characterized by a pro-governmental stand), *Nouvel Horizon* (*NH*, magazine which undertakes enquiries on specific topics), *Walfadjri*, *Le Matin* and *l'Obs* (*Observateur*).

In the following part we explore the processes of social construction of migrant representation “on Senegalese land” through the examination of the relationship between Media and Migration (Wood & King 2001), and how the social actors use and give sense to information technologies and the “images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1996: 35; Abu-Lughod 1997; Riccio 2001, 2007a). By deconstructing the images and the discourses of Senegalese media, we will shed light on the discordances between these “interpretative frames” (Goffmann 1975) and the representations produced by migrants and non-migrants, as well as their “narrations of elsewhere” (Fouquet 2007; degli Uberti 2011a).

### Mbëkkmi: Its Protagonists and the Organisation of the Travel

The history of Senegalese emigrations beyond the African borders dates back to the colonial period when the French administrations enrolled the *tirailleurs sénégalais* at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and during World War I (Bertoncello & Bredeloup 2004; Thilmans & Rosière 2008). After the national independence of Senegal (1960), the Senegalese emigrations to Europe<sup>5</sup> have turned around the brotherhood *Muridyaa* and its central role in establishing transnational connections and a social and economic safety net for all migrants arriving in France, and lately in the other European countries (Schmidt di Friedberg 1994; Riccio 2006). More recently, from the last decade of twentieth century, the migratory projects spring ever more from family and individual initiatives of men and women. The *Modou modou*<sup>6</sup> are generally single men from rural background, mainly belonging to the Wolof ethnic group. Initially they start working as peddlers but afterwards they look for job as salaried workers in import-export trading activities (Ndiaye 1998; Mboup 2000).

The 1969 devaluation of the FCFA and the crisis of peanut exports (1984) affecting the regions of Baol, Djambour, Cayor and Sine, became a further source in driving many Senegalese people to emigrate from the Senegal river valley and the region of Tambacunda. Initially those immigrants found jobs in the sector of the French automotive industries (particularly

5. Over half of all Senegalese emigrants abroad originate from three regions in Senegal: Dakar and its suburbs, the Senegal River Valley in the North and the city of Touba and its surroundings.

6. “*Modou modou*” has progressively become the Wolof term that refers to the Mourid migrants, and more broadly the Senegalese migrants from Diourbel, Kebemer and Touba. The expression often identifies an ideal type: the itinerant and illiterate merchant, who knows trading well, is very good at saving, is mainly interested in economic gain and investing in glamorous things when he is back in Senegal. The attitude toward saving and the labor pursued far from home for the well-being of the family are assumed as the key factors of the social success. The features support the image of the *Modou modou* as symbol of Senegalese contemporary society.

in Marseille). After 1985, when France introduced a compulsory visa for Senegal, Germany (Marfaing 2003), Italy, Spain and the United States became the main destinations of Senegalese migrants.

The rising emergence of new migratory routes, such as the pirogue migrations, is partially tied to changes occurring at multiple levels. Internationally we refer, in particular, to the bilateral agreement signed between the Spanish and Moroccan governments (2005), and the increasing enforcement and externalisation of border controls that EU countries have undertaken towards Maghreb countries (2002), transformed into a “buffer zone” to reduce migratory pressures at Europe’s southern borders. Some urban and peri-urban areas of the Senegalese coasts became the main points of departure: Kayar, Saint Louis (Guet Ndar), M’bour and Saly, Dakar and its peripheries (Thiaroye-sur-Mer, Yarakh and Pikine).

PICTURE 2. — DAKAR. CAPE VERDE PENINSULA: POINTS OF DEPARTURES

Drawing from the narratives collected among peddlers, youth workers and university graduates (*maîtrisard*), the high rate of unemployment is more frequently mentioned as the reason to explain the “risk” undertaken by many “candidates” to emigrate in pirogue (Carling & Hernández Carretero 2008).

Although a “culture of getting by” (*“culture de la débrouille”* or *“Goor-góorlu”* in Wolof) subsumes a complex mix of family responsibilities and subjective aspirations, the pirogue migrations, as noted by M.-C. Diop (2008), are nonetheless the result of multiple other factors:

- the decline of France and Ivory Coast as the preferential destination places of Senegalese migrations;
- the increased danger and difficulties of trans-Saharan routes through the towns of Ceuta and Melilla;
- the decreasing role of *Muridyya* in organizing migratory networks;
- the crisis of the local and regional fishing economy sharpened by unfavourable weather conditions;
- the increased competition in trade sector, especially in the demographically saturated urban area of Dakar. For many people it becomes more difficult to switch from the activity of peddler to the development of more stable professions;
- the effects of the unregulated liberal policies inaugurated by the ex-president Abdoulaye Wade in 2000;
- the central role played by financial and moral support of mothers and wives to the candidates to migration which has been called into question by certain studies (Sarr *et al.* 2009);
- the cultural, economic and visual influence of the investment properties of returning migrants (Tall 2008; Melly 2010);
- the phone calls of first pirogue migrants arrived in Spain in winter 2005.

Numerous people have been involved in the organization of the pirogue travel, above all, the migrant relatives, the pirogue craftsmen and the *marabouts* called to “ease the migratory path” with their prayers or benedictions. The construction of pirogues and the departures generally have taken place on the sly. The journeys have been coordinated by both the *borom gaal* (chief of expedition and generally owner of the pirogue) and by the captains who are fishermen with long sailing experience. The *passeurs* (fishermen who have found the transport of migrants more lucrative than the artisan fisheries) have been responsible for the recruitment of people. This preparation has more often occurred during the weeks before the *Korité* or *Tabaski* (l’*Aïd-el-Kebir*). The *passeurs* are the brokers between migrants and captains; they ease the migrants departure and administer the money (almost 500.000 FCFA or 760.00 € for each person), providing fuel, food, a GPS system and, but not always, lifejackets.



April 2006 marked an uncontrolled expansion of pirogue migrations from Senegal. While in 2005 more than 4.790 migrants were directed to the Spanish Archipelago, in 2006 there were 33.000 persons of whom 23.000 in the second half of the year and 7.500 in the month of September alone. More than a half of these migrants were of Senegalese nationality (Carrera 2007; Willems 2008). However, in the following years, the bilateral agreements signed between the Senegalese and Spanish governments (2006), and extended to the Mauritanian government led to a tightening of border controls and the establishing of a naval surveillance system that brought a progressive reduction of migration flows and a surge in the number of repatriated people.

In the face of the strong public disapproval expressed by Senegalese population toward the repatriations, in 2006 the Wade's government put forward a response to youth unemployment issues by launching the REVA plan (*Retour vers l'agriculture*). However, the project was met with tepid enthusiasm by direct recipients. They showed dissatisfaction due to the lack of real attention toward the socio-professional background of the returnees, and to serious concerns about the "not very clear" management of the allocation of resources, along with the absence of an essential funding for agricultural technology (Maggi *et al.* 2008).

In order to address the complexity surrounding the emergence of the phenomenon of pirogue migrations, we consider the adoption of an emic perspective on mobility. Focusing on the urban context of M'bour we will shed light on the considerable relevance assumed by local, historical and cultural dimension of migrations, as well as by the values and practices attached to them.

### What Kind of "Culture of Migration" in M'bour?

"The Haalpulaar know where they were born but they do not know where they will be buried (Haalpulaar proverb).

It is better to live as a poor and suffering immigrant rather than being wretched at home (Haalpulaar proverb).

Whoever comes back from a trip and becomes a country bumpkin, was not a smart person in the country where he resided" (Wolof proverb).

Numerous examples, widely described in the specialized literature<sup>7</sup>, as well as in the recent collective work edited by Momar-Coumba Diop (2008), show how the history of Senegal is characterized by itinerancy and mobility. These proverbs are just some linguistic examples among many that suggest how the idea of travelling, migration and the representation of its

7. Among many references, I suggest C. BECKER (1994): he offers a compendium of the groups involved in international migrations, the changes which have occurred from prehistoric times to the national independence.

protagonists are celebrated (Tall & Tandian 2010) and assume a central role in the collective consciousness of people, nourishing their desire to travel.

“Whoever migrates is a needle”<sup>8</sup>: with these words the father of Amadou—a man who emigrated from Diol-Kadd (Serer village in the province of Thiess) to Italy in the early nineties—explained to me the importance of migration to preserve unity and continuity among family members. Like a needle, the migrant sows and guarantees the social and economic stability of his relatives, in compensation of the trust and consideration they had shown him. The migratory travel is not necessarily the result of a choice or an extra-ordinary act, but rather a social practice that meets family needs and commitments, and represents a form of solidarity (in Wolof *yewen*) or generosity (*mbaax*): two of the main Senegalese values (Riccio 2005). Moreover, focusing on its subjective dimension, the migratory travel is not a mere vehicle to obtain a job, but rather symbolizes the path through which the migrant achieves financial security, and also social prestige among his peers. In Senegal social integrity (*gore*) and family solidarity are also values closely associated to migration. For example, the songs of many famous Senegalese musicians talk about the deeds of migrants as symbols of contemporary Senegalese society, for their solidarity and efforts to live away from home in behalf of their family welfare. *Immigrés* and *Solidarité* are some of the *mbalax* songs dedicated to migrants by Youssou N’Dour<sup>9</sup> (Riccio 2007b). “We thank you and pray for you” (*Immigrés*)—says the Senegalese singer “because the immigrants really strive to work for the family [...]; they maintain almost ten people; I know they are happy only when they sent the money to their family” (*Solidarité*). The Senegalese migration becomes expression of the concept of *gore* when migrants show their solidarity to their families, to the extent that they are willing to accept jobs that they would otherwise reject in their country. As recalled by Youssou N’Dour in his celebration song of the immigrant: “If he could, he would have worked in his country within a more supportive environment” (*Solidarité*).

Similarly, other values that are linked to the influence of Islam in Senegal play a greater social influence in shaping a “culture of migration”. For example, as L. Marfaing (2003) notes, the meaning of “egira”—it literally means in Arabic “separation” or “removal”—is closely linked to the idea of travel, migration, in memory of the exile of Muhammad who left for Medina after being chased away from Mecca in 622 AD. Among many Senegalese, the migration represents a way to retrace the travels or the exiles of their saints, such as El Hadji Oumar Tall, who promoted the diffusion

8. Field notes, 13.08.04.

9. The *mbalax* is a music style that developed in the seventies as a result of a revision and modernization of the rhythms and their accompanying Wolof as well as their hybridization with other musical genres such as jazz and *rythm’n blues*. This creative mixing between the tradition of griots and foreign musical genres becomes stronger in the eighties of Century XX. (BENGA 2002).

of the Tijani brotherhood in Senegal. He went into exile for several years in the mid-nineteenth century, and then came back regaining, through his social and religious influence, the territories occupied by the French colonial power. The story of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the founder of the Mouridism, is similar. After being exiled by the French colonizers, he returned to Senegal and founded Touba, the holy city of Mouridism.

Following these considerations, travelling becomes the metaphor of remoteness, a temporary detachment, necessary in order to come back to the territory of origin strengthened by the wisdom ripened during his exile. The wish to migrate becomes the symbol of the desire to leave one's own native land to find "elsewhere" the means to return as a winner, or to claim the one's own "success" (*"réussir"*) and social status.

Mobility, as suggested by these considerations, is defined therefore as a historical process that takes shape over time, in relation to the everyday experiences of its protagonists (De Bruijn *et al.* 2001). Focusing more closely on M'bour, one of the places mostly touched by the migrations in pirogue, we highlight the importance of retracing, through an historical approach, the locally specific "culture of migration" in order to understand the social context of the emergence of the pirogue migrations.

M'bour is the area with the highest average rate of repatriated migrants (Cesti 2007; Sarr *et al.* 2009). In the city fishermen are the ones most actively involved in pirogue migrations. Contrary to the misleading representations that the media construct on the relationship between fishermen and migration, it may be adequate to answer the following questions: why have the fishermen assumed this central role, not only in the organisation of pirogue travels but also numerically, as migrants? Can we consider the migratory dimension and the "culture of migration" recent aspects that characterize the local fishermen activities of M'bour?

In Western Africa the artisan fishery, as maintained by J.-C. Nguingiri (2000), has been always characterized by the movement of fishermen who used to undertake distant travels from one country to another. These travels mainly occurred in the countries overlooking the Central and Eastern part of the Atlantic Ocean, from Mauritania to the Congo. The most significant are: the travels of the Ghanaian fishermen (*Ewe* and *Fanti*) who move further up to Guinea; those of Beninese fishermen (*Xwla* and *Xwéda*) who head up to Cameroon, Gabon and Congo; those of the Nigerian fishermen who sail up to Cameroon; and finally those of Senegalese fishermen who sail far north to Mauritania and south beyond the coasts of Guinea.

These sailing routes are rather old and probably date from the late nineteenth century (Chauveau 1991): they may be divided into three periods: – 1880-1910. Establishment of three migratory areas dominated by the Senegalese and Ghanaian migration, as well as by the mobility processes occurring in the region of Luanda and Angola;

## PICTURE 3. — ROUTES OF THE ARTISAN FISHERIES

(Chauveau *et al.* 2000: 331)

- 1920-1960. Intensification of migratory flows linked to the expansion of the Slave colonial economy (1920-1930) and, on the other hand, to the extension of the Senegalese migrations (Wolof and Lébou) up to the Gulf of Guinea and those of Fante groups up to Liberia and Sierra Leone;
- 1960-1980. Determination of the geographical limits of Senegalese migrations and further extension of Ghanaian sailing routes.

Historically, in Senegal the fisheries involved mainly the members of Lébou group, who carried out this activity already in pre-colonial times when, for fishing, they emigrated along the Western coast of Africa, from Mauritania to Guinea Conakry/Bissau, to Liberia, to Sierra Leone and up to Benin, in order to look for seas full of fish and new opportunities (Bonnardel 1992); travelling at that time was not a means to escape a state of distress and scarcity.

The Senegalese fishermen showed, and still show, the greatest and most concrete mobility in the entire Sub-region: “A spectacular level of mobility

considering that these migrations could be near or far, seasonal or permanent, regular or not” (Chauveau *et al.* 2000: 10).

“Today we still travel up to Guinea Bissau or Mauritania in order to fish and buy palm oil. We go to sea for a week or even ten days with pirogues full of ice. We have the license to fish in these countries” (Abdou, GIE Migrants, district Tefesse, M’bour, 17.07.09).

For long time mobility was a constitutive part of the livelihood of M’bour fishermen, who often decided to settle in places where the resources were abundant<sup>10</sup>: this phenomenon explains, for example, the large number of Senegalese fishermen of Guet Ndar who settled in the cities of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou in Mauritania or Banjul in Gambia (Marfaing 2005; Nyamnjoh 2010).

The migratory mobilities tied to fishing activities are also pushed by the goal of following the so-called phenomenon of “upwelling” occurring in the Gulf of Guinea: the annual cycle of “outcropping” in the ocean surface of the deep cold waters of the seabed. In fact, during the occurrence of this phenomenon it is easier to follow the migratory flow of fish (Overa 2005). In other words, the Lébou fishermen appear to be involved in seasonal migration processes that are marked by the migratory movements of fishes. However, what seems more important is that the participation in these events is considered symbolically as the achieving of adult age. Long-distance fishing represents a symbolic stage that marks the beginning of a full-fledged career and the public acknowledgment of the capability to lead a pirogue.

Particularly enlightening are, to this regard, the observations of F. B. Nyamnjoh (2005) regarding the extent to which the development of a “culture of migration” may be informed by the meanings attributed to fishing activity or to some of its aspects. More specifically we refer to the metaphorical meaning applied, for example, to some fishes in order to denote wealth and social standing: the *yaboy* and the *thiouf*<sup>11</sup>. The notion of *yaboy* is widely used in reference to men; all those who undertake the pirogue travel are *yaboys*. The travel to the Canary Islands is seen as the means through which the migrant tries to rise from the status of *yaboy* to that of *thiouf*. The migration of many Senegalese by sea becomes as the “way to fish their way to social mobility” (Nyamnjoh 2010: 46).

10. In her study of Senegalese fishermen in Mauritania, L. MARFAING (2005) shows how in recent years the globalization of the fishing industry in this country has led to the progressive marginalization of Senegalese people, reducing them from independent individuals with a specialized professional knowledge to vulnerable immigrant workforce constantly driven to look at migrations to Europe as the only opportunity to redeem their previous social status.

11. The term *yaboy* identifies the sardine fish, a fish which due to its bony nature is difficult to be eaten; likewise the term relates to young men who have nothing to offer women. Instead, the *thiouf* is the grouper; it is generally the most expensive fish and is used as an epithet to identify the wealthy men who can offer a comfortable life to their wives and girlfriends.

In the recent years the rapid changes in lifestyle and taste regarding certain consumer goods may partially explain the rising interest on migration of the fishermen of M'bour. In general, the activities of artisan fisheries are characterized by a rigid lifestyle; for most of fishermen, their profession still implies sobriety and the lack of large consuming practices. The proceeds of the artisan fisheries are usually invested in fishing equipment, maintenance and repair of pirogue engines. There has been a gradual shift from investments exclusively directed to fishing activity towards expenditures that are mainly directed to meet social needs and consumption interests. Such a shift from a rigid to a more comfortable lifestyle, followed by the propensity to migrate to Europe, may be related to the presence of European tourists who crowd the beaches of Petite Côte, intrigued by the exotic performance of artisan fisheries (degli Uberti 2011a).

Taking into account that the Senegalese fishermen who followed the migration processes of fish, were accustomed to moving for long periods of time over considerable distances—to South from Joal and M'bour for six months (October to March) and from Casamance (April-September)—the migration to the Canary Islands has been perceived initially as merely traveling for fishing but, in this case, as fishing for a better future. Moreover, when the news about the first pirogue trips came out, the Senegalese fishermen who were the greater experts of the sea routes, gained recognition and great benefits from their service. The new route to the Canary Islands, crossing a geographical area well-known to M'bour fishermen, quickly became one of the main Senegalese migratory routes and, at the same time, the expression of continuity in the culture of mobility and a new means of social success.

Due to the gradual decrease in the amount of fish<sup>12</sup>, the role of the *passeur* and the potential opportunities of migration to the Canary Islands plausibly started to be seen by many fishermen as one of the best livelihood alternatives compared to the long and poorly paid hours of work. In addition, the wooden pirogues were unable to compete with the means available to the large European fishing boats. While the artisan fishermen have gained modest benefits from their involvement in pirogue migration (Sall & Morand 2008), in many cases, the choice to migrate has become one of the ways to meet the high cost of artisan fishing activities. Although this condition concerns many young people, it is perceived even more among the elderly fishermen who have raised their concerns about the possibilities of ensuring

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12. The reduction in fish resources seems to be a phenomenon mainly due to over-exploitation and industrialization of fishing activities; these changes are directly related to the fisheries agreement signed by Senegal with the European Union (2006). The situation was further exacerbated because another agreement was previously signed by former President Abdou Diouf with Koreans and Chinese. Although the European countries have access to only two per cent of Senegalese fish resources (FALL 2006), they are accused of over-exploiting the resources of the country.

enough independence to their children to allow them to create a family. The figure of “humiliated father” that is described by C. Melman (2002) and recalled by M.-C. Diop (2008), appears to subsume the consequences of the social and economic crisis of both the fishing and agricultural sectors. Generally polygamous, the father’s authority over sons and daughters is debased when his status as person who can authorize and forbid, is progressively questioned due to his economic weakness. Within this context, the pirogue migration is not only a livelihood strategy for both individuals and family (De Haas 2008) but is rather perceived as a cultural phenomenon, as a vehicle to achieve a greater authority and social status, especially for men.

Other factors have also hampered the fishermen activities: the reduction in more attractive fishing areas (es. the little city of Saly) and the introduction of new regulations, such as the ban on the practice of fish drying and smoking, considered harmful to the touristic economy. Many fishermen of M’bour were forced to move to Mballing, five miles away, leaving their habitual place of work. This change caused several obstacles to the reproduction of a long-established socio-economic system because the fishermen suddenly found themselves detached from their habitual local customers and from the opportunity to trade directly with the touristic resorts (Dehoorne & Diagne 2008).

As recalled by several informants, while in the regions of Louga, Diourbel, Touba and Futa—the rural areas most frequently affected by drought—migrating to Europe, even irregularly, has been always on people’s lips, it has never been a prior interest among the fishermen of M’bour. In fact, in the region of Petite Côte the migration processes are historically linked to tourism and more specifically to the phenomenon of mixed marriages (*mariages mixtes*) between Senegalese and elderly European people which represented for long time the main way to migrate (Salomon 2009).

### Narrations and Representations on the “Senegalese Migrant”

The low rate of employment that characterizes the Senegalese labour market has driven many people, especially young, to look to migration as a source, if not the source of socio-economic improvement. To migrate in Europe, “*partir... aller là-bas*”, is the daily topic on the lips of those remaining in Senegal!

The words, the emotions and the gestures through which potential migrants think about migration and its real or imaginary destinations, assume a great importance: the different historical forms of migrant representation shed light on the social and political transformations of Senegal (Maggi *et al.* 2008). To this regard, B. Riccio (2007a) maintains that the representation of the “Senegalese migrant” is ambivalent: migrants are seen both as heroes and tricksters at the same time. But in what sense their image is ambivalent?



The flaunting of wealth during their temporary return and the provision of financial support through remittances and co-development projects have fuelled a peculiar image of *Modou modou*. While, on the one hand, the *Modou modou* becomes a symbol of “success”, the “contemporary hero” who embodies the idea of social mobility (*ibid.*), on the other his attachment to the *Toubab* world, namely the “world of White people”, fuels a divergent representation, often expressed by the interest in foreign music, literature and popular culture. “Being an immigrant” becomes synonymous of “to act as the Westerners”, without solidarity, tolerance, moderation, hospitality and dignity: the main Senegalese values.

The figure of *Modou modou* appears ambivalent. He is seen as an illiterate and astute saver, but also as a crude trader devoted to ostentatious dissipation of assets acquired fraudulently. This latter aspect is tied to a specific perception of Europe, the “elsewhere” where the migrants live. In the face of the public and flaunted display of their symbols of success (new houses, clothes...), the migrants describe Europe as an impenetrable and inhospitable fortress to foreigners seeking work. These testimonies support the idea of the migrant as a “cheat” who mystifies or conceals the true conditions of life. This critical reading is however joined by a more famous one that reaffirms the image of a European *El Dorado* where migrants are seen as gold mines.

Starting from the ambivalent image of Senegalese migrant, we will now turn the attention on the representations and self-representations of pirogue migrations circulating in the media and everyday life, in order to show the significant changes occurred over time. Far from being static facts, the social representations of the migrant are historical processes that change over time in relation to socio-cultural, economic and political transformations.

### Being Clandestine on the “Other Side” of the Mediterranean Sea

The interest shown by Senegalese newspapers on pirogue migrations, especially in the early years of emergence (2006-2007), mainly focused on descriptions of the migratory travel. As far as the practical and symbolic preparation of the venture is concerned, the attention was often centred on the stages before departure.

“Two o’clock in the morning: at that time of the day you breathe a total calm. [...] A dozen stalwarts arrive with their bags, gas cylinders and equipment for tea and utensils for cooking (*Le Devoil*, 11-17.05.06).

Three o’clock at night. On a dark beach, in a cool night without stars, the sea is calm. The inhabitants of the coast, who are still in the arms of Morpheus, do not even suspect what is happening not far from their homes (*L’Obs*, 17.05.06).

Reaching Europe aboard a makeshift boat: this is the new emigration trend that is all the rage in Senegal (*Le Populaire*, 17.05.07).

The clandestine immigration: faith and fearlessness as sources of life” (*Walf*, 17.05.06).



Dawn, baggage, the goods on board, the construction of pirogues; these elements make up a narrative plot where the migrant experience is portrayed as a romanticized description. The migrant is someone who wishes “to do the migration” (“*faire la migration*”) not because of lack of work, but because he is an adventurer, a daredevil, a stalwart (Bredeloup 2008; Schmitz 2008)!

Using an expressive form that recalls the *griotage*<sup>13</sup>, migrants are pictured when they express more strongly their feelings of hope and uncertainty, emphasizing the emotional and mythical dimension of their journey. This representation is also emphasized by the description of the other individuals involved. The *passeurs*, for example, are represented as “merchants of illusion” (*Le Quotidien*, 2006); they are drawn like the images of a comic strip: *Clandestine Emigration. L’Aventure mortelle*<sup>14</sup>. The *passeur* becomes the personification of the “elsewhere”. Dressing a T-shirt and a Yankees cap, he is portrayed as an unscrupulous individual who lures his victims.

PICTURE 4. — COVER PAGE, *AFRIQUE CITOYENNE*, N° 13, 2006

13. By using an emphatic and romanticized style, the *griotage* (in reference to the peculiar narrative practices of the griots) refers to an expressive form that sets the narration of a real event in a extra-ordinary dimension, where the values of charm and seduction become semantically very important (WITTMANN 2008: 487-488).

14. Published by the Association sénégalaise de coopération décentralisée and the Fondation Konrad Adenauer.

PICTURE 5. — *AFRIQUE CITOYENNE*, N° 13, p. 8, 2006

Another recurring word with which the press describes the clandestine emigrant is “young”. The pirogue migration is portrayed as a phenomenon affecting mainly boys between 20 and 29 years (Mbow & Tamba 2007). However, a more careful analysis reveals that the word “young” is not used only in generational terms:

“The emigrants are children who go looking for adventure to conquer Europe: the Unknown (*Le Quotidien*, 14.05.09).

Victims of their good faith. Persons driven by the force of desperation (*Walf*, 06.18.09).

Clandestine emigrants: the damned of the sea (*NH*, 2006).

Emigrants and the crazy drunk on Elsewhere (*ibid.*).

The Spanish Canary archipelago: the new gateway for the El Dorado” (*ibid.*).

Being young does not seem to identify a biological category, but rather a cultural one. It becomes a synonym of *naïveté* and immaturity. The clandestine emigrant is portrayed as a victim, an adventurer who is driven to leave guided by courage and certain ingenuousness in dreaming up an idyllic and imaginary “elsewhere”, whereof they would know little or nothing: the *El Dorado*.

The will to succeed and an emotive sense of responsibility towards parents or relatives—which are generally the most frequently reasons given by migrants when they explain their decision to emigrate—are the features adopted by the media to reaffirm the image of the clandestine emigrant as naive and immature. To this regard, the texts and images of a photo story (entitled *La pirogue de la mort*) published in *Cœurs d’Afrique*<sup>15</sup> (May 2009) is particularly eloquent.

The story starts with the words of Médoune to his girlfriend. Médoune, a young Senegalese, expresses his impatience towards a situation of enduring unemployment that hinders any possibility of professional development or marriage plan, despite the opportunity offered by his academic level: “We cannot go on in this way. [...] To have a diploma and remain five years without work, what a nightmare!” By realizing his impossibility to succeed, Médoune discusses with Diana the concrete possibility of migrating abroad.

Although the sense of responsibility to himself and his beloved would seem to portray Médoune as a mature and conscientious migrant—“Emigrating to give sense to one’s own life” “I understand love only if it is with dignity!”—, the means that he displays to achieve his goal lead the author of the story to depict him as an immature person, rather irresponsible and not very loyal.

In order to collect enough money to travel, Médoune does not reveal the intention to travel in pirogue to his sister. This lie that becomes the pivot around which the events of the story take place, assumes an important role in the characterization of the protagonist.

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15. *Cœurs d’Afrique* is a Senegalese magazine for young girls; it deals with general issues in a plain style: news, cuisine, zodiac, music and fashion.

PICTURES 6 & 7. — PHOTOS STORY PANELS, *CŒURS D'AFRIQUE* (2009)

Just as the Senegalese newspapers represent clandestine emigrants, Médoune is marked by the ingenuousness in the way he speaks to his girlfriend, despite the true belief that he seems to put in his words: “Many pirogues get to Spain. You just have to accept the risk!” [With reference to the TV news on sinking boats of migrants]. “It is only a public campaign that aims to discourage those who want to leave. Many friends of mine have left in pirogue and now they work in Europe.”

PICTURES 8 & 9. — PHOTOS STORY PANELS, *CŒURS D'AFRIQUE* (2009)

Conversely, both the female characters of the story, Diana and Eva (Medoune's sister) are pictured instead as reliable people. They show their own "agency", firstly because they warn Médoune against the risk of "death" and secondly, because they are the ones who provided the money for the journey, once they have sold their jewellery and other personal properties. As a whole, both the photo story and the Senegalese newspapers convey a social representation of migrant as victim of his own naive sense of adventure who chases an imaginary "elsewhere".

The stories of several young men I met seem rather to outline quite a different image of the pirogue "clandestine" migrant, compared to those arising from the processes of victimization and depersonalization to which he is subjected by the media.

"I am one of those! [...] I'm one of those who have defied the sea and done the clandestine emigration!" (Assane, M'bour, 08.28.09).

Assane, for instance, takes voluntarily upon himself the term of "clandestine", not as a sign of status, but rather as a favourably distinctive feature that identifies people who are proud, responsible for their own destiny and for their role within the family, being seriously motivated to "succeed" in a country that is perceived as a "prison" (*"la galère"*).

The ambivalent social representation of the migrant clearly emerges when we turn our attention to the concept of *El Dorado* and to the meanings attached to the slogan "*Barça ou Barsakh*", that the migrants have coined, even though it is highly used by the mass media.

"Their belief, at risk of their life, is: '*Europe or death*' (*L'Obs*, 22.05.06). Jihad against the poverty. A holy-war that ends up with the slogan: *Barça o Barsakh*. *Barça* stands for Barcelona, the Spanish city that is considered from the migrants as an *El Dorado*, and therefore the Heaven. As far as concerns the word *Barsakh*, it means the Netherworld; it is the heaven devoted to all those people who die in a holy-war. Consequently, the destiny of all the people who brave the sea in order to get to Spain or the death will be either the heaven on Earth or the heaven on Netherworld" (*Le Quotidien*, 14.05.09).

The phrase "*Barça ou Barsakh*" is generally translated: "Barcelona or death". As suggested above, in the Senegalese newspapers the term *Barsakh* is interpreted instead as Hereafter, the "paradise of Allah". In this case the two parts of the phrase are placed in an otherworldly dimension (there or there). Insofar as the Senegalese media attach the meaning of "Hereafter" to the term *Barsakh* they perpetuate the image of *Bengodi*, the idea of an imaginary and paradisiacal "elsewhere" which migrants would yearn for.

"Here it is like a nightmare! [...] we do not make it anymore! (Ousmane, M'bour, 27.05.09).

Babakar: Staring at Europe is not a mistake but it should to be done with reasonableness. The Senegalese people are dreamers. Luckily today there are less people

who spend time drinking *ataya* (tea) and longing for a 4x4 or a rich foreign woman. I don't dream about going to Europe.

Stefano: Are you a dreamer?

B: Well [...] yes. I am a dreamer. But, *I don't dream about going to Europe but rather of being capable of working as a lorry driver* in order to travel and cross over on cities and countries [...] Germany, Italy [...] I want to *be in touch* with the road!

S: [considering the idea of travelling and the importance that Babakar gives to roads, I ask him teasingly]. And so, would you wish to migrate or to go along roads that you do not know?

B: I would not go along roads that I do not know [...] I would travel to an unknown place but only because I am motivated and pushed to go there driven by my interests. I am not interested in going to France or Spain [...] I am interested in travelling by night to cross borders!" (M'bour, 22.08.09).

Conversely, as suggested by Babakar, the slogan *Barça ou Barsakh* sets a contrast between two real earthly dimensions. "Barcelona" is not necessarily the *El Dorado*, and *Barsakh* does not refer to physical death, but rather to the social death of a person trapped in a state of "involuntary immobility", due to the difficulty in being a success in the social context where he lives (Carling 2002). Therefore, "Here" and "There" refer to concrete life conditions. While "Barcelona" symbolises an opportunity of personal and professional development, "Senegal" represents the state of "social death": a country unable to ensure either economic development or reproduction of social and family relationships.

In the conversation with Babakar the image of the adventurer is far from equating the idea of naive dreamer disseminated by the press. Babakar does not dream of an "elsewhere" or an imaginary Europe, but rather he wishes to cross its borders, working in his truck. For EU citizens the borders between the member states are just signs of an historical memory. By "crossing borders" the migrants appear to reaffirm not only the willingness to succeed through mobility, but also the effort to escape dominant interpretative categories.

The will of migrants to "succeed" is not the expression of a desire to get rich quickly (the stereotyped idea of "elsewhere" as *El Dorado*) but rather is synonymous with "social success" or "social adulthood" as suggested by J. Bjarnesen (2007: 6-7) in his study on youngsters in Dakar: "Social adulthood (the 'path towards adulthood') is a multifaceted position which implies more than simply being independent from one's parents and elder brothers and being able to marry. [It] may be understood as the sense of being a complete man."

"*Faire la migration*" becomes the expression of a desire for knowledge, and is synonymous with the idea of labour mobility. As suggested by Babakar, in Senegal the idea of "staying mobile" does not necessarily refer to the desire to migrate, but it also means succeeding. A desire for social, rather than physical, mobility seems to drive many people, predominantly

male, to take the risks of the journey in pirogue (Hernández Carretero & Carling 2012).

The migrants enhance the adventurous dimension of their experience through the celebrative narration of their migratory travel. The term of “clandestine emigrant” becomes a favourable appellative of self-representation. In the conversations with the repatriated migrants the narration of the travel emerges as a means of understanding their role within the social fabric. The drive to migrate towards foreign destination countries is not necessarily tied to economic reasons. The place of destination does not have a substantial relevance and the travel itself is not perceived as a “rite of passage” but rather as an experience of continuity in daily life that could open the door to multiple unknown opportunities. “Travelling” becomes synonymous with the possibility of “conceiving the future”. Mobility symbolises a social practice of projection of a future self away from home (Gardner 1993) and perhaps, as critically maintained by J. O. Ifekwunigwe (2013) with reference to boat migrations, the contemporary Mediterranean expression of the historical and persistent devaluation of African life as illustrated by the conceptual frame of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993).

“Everyone would like to take the subway or go to Rome. The boundaries hinder the desire to discover and to experience. The barriers to knowledge make our subalternity (Aliou, repatriated from Mauritania, bus driver in Dakar, Dakar, 23.05.09). Poverty is linked to the lack of curiosity and to the little desire to learn [...] to travel” (Yassine, UN Mozambiquen officer, Dakar, 05.07.09).

Even just attempting the travel becomes therefore a means of improvement and social distinction. In particular, following the experience of repatriation, the travel seems to assume a ritual meaning. It becomes a “liminal” moment (Turner 1982), only afterwards, if the migrants are able to “succeed” socially by getting married or finding a new job (Melly 2011). This seems to be the case of Malik, the maternal uncle tied to the family who hosted me during my stay in M’bour. Although I had met him since my arrival in May 2009, only a week before my departure, after months of reciprocal acquaintance and friendship, Malik unexpectedly revealed me his experience as pirogue migrant. He told me about his travel to the Canary Islands.

“ [...] Life took me to Tenerife because I was tired. I left because I could not do anything else: I did not have chance to work; I could not marry.

I tried twice to emigrate by pirogue. I, or rather, we all lined the coast, crossing the ocean, almost up to the Strait of Gibraltar where the two seas meet, and the hope begins!! But I remember those days very well.

The trip with pirogue can last up to twenty days. I found myself crying for other people, throwing people overboard [...] seeing others die! During that trip I saw and I have known many things [...] in a single life!!

When I arrived to the Canary Islands I was not myself anymore. My name was no longer Malik but Ousmane; I was no more Senegalese, but Mauritanian. People

in Tenerife do not tell their real names. After I was repatriated: the first time in Saint Louis and the second one in Mauritania.

It needs courage and strength; now, after these experiences, I still have them: I am married and I continue to commit myself" (Malik, M'bour, 30.08.09).

### The Local Dimension of Migration. The *Modou modou*: Still a Model to Follow?

A significant sign of the shift in meaning and the "local dimension" in the social representation of the Senegalese migrant is the use of the term *Euro-péen* in place of *Modou modou*, in order to speak about those who live abroad. The change that I have witnessed is not only terminological, but also semantic and symbolic.

"Stefano: Mmh [...] but [...] what kind of Europeans are you talking about?

Babakar: I am not talking of the 'Europeans of Europe' but of the 'Europeans of Africa'. I am speaking about all those Senegalese people who live in Europe and come back here. When they return to Africa these people are always surrounded by young pretty girls whom they could easily conquer because these girls think that the Europeans have a lot of money! These 'Europeans' exploit this situation and they do not pay respect to our society [...] I am outraged at that!! Do you get what I am saying?! [...] I am talking about that! That is the way wherein the Europeans think [...] there are people who behave like that. There are many girls who are forced to leave [Senegal] to stay with the Europeans. The Europeans do not support the construction of schools and so on [...] they are only interested in keeping their money and taking care of their interests. It seems that they do not have time of the rest" (Babakar. M'bour, 22.07.09).

The use of the term *Euro-péen* is documented especially in the tourist areas of the *Petite Côte*, where many returning migrants spend a couple of weeks or even more in order to enjoy the luxurious beach services that are generally a privilege of foreign tourists. Equally, also the *Dakarois* (citizens of Dakar) are identified as



*Européens*. Dakar and its citizens, especially from the point of view of those who live outside the Cape Verde peninsula, embody an ill-defined “European or Western way of life”. By using the term *Européen* people refer to changes occurring in some practices of everyday life. In particular, the young *Dakarois*, the so-called *cityboys*, are blamed for the withdrawal of some domestic and convivial habits, and for the flaunted display of a *Parisien* way of speaking. People talking in the streets of M’bour may often be heard saying: “Dakar is already Europe!” [...] “Dakar is the spring-board for Europe.”

“People come to M’bour for working [...] people go to Dakar in order to travel to Europe!! (shopkeeper, M’bour, 15.07.09).

Dakar is different, Dakar is not Senegal! The bourgeois lives there. *In Dakar, people adopt the ‘European way of living’* [...] people eat with spoons. When people are dining you could see husbands reading the newspaper, calling their wives and *discussing what is going on in the world!* If they were here, they could not complain if suddenly in their plates there is nothing more to eat. But there [in Dakar] it is different because everyone has his own plate. [Here the speaker refers to the habit of consuming food altogether in a big common plate] (shopkeeper, district of Escale, M’bour, 07.07.09).

[Sited with Babakar on the seashores of M’bour beaches] Look at them! You can recognise the cityboys at a distance [...] by how they dress, by how they walk. They never walk on the seaside but on the beaches because they don’t want to wet their feet. They do not come to M’bour because there is the sea but rather because they want to spend a day in a swimming pool [...] in a touristic resort, in luxury. They want to experience the European comfort. For this reason, they spend their weekly salary!! The Europeans behave in the same way! But there are also many Mauritians, Moroccans [...] Lebanese!!” (Babakar, M’bour, 02.08.09).

The words of Pape, a trader working in *Sandaga*, the main market of Dakar, do not sound very different. He seems to be even more critical, coming to equate the *Modou modou* to foreign Lebanese and Moroccan traders who are generally disliked due to their growing economic extension in most of the strategic commercial areas of the capital city.

“Due to the recent phenomenon of clandestine migrations in the last years there are always more repatriated people who look for work as vendors. Moreover, there are always more *Modou modou* who come back [to Senegal] and invade the market of *Sandaga*. It is a shame [...] because they do not pay respect!! By now in Senegal the majority of vendors are foreigners: Chinese, Moroccans, Lebanese [...] and the *Modou modou* are not different!!” (Pape, shopkeeper of Rue Petavain, Dakar, 18.04.09).

By considering how the migrants’ reality abroad is described in the Senegalese newspapers and in the iconographic materials, we point out a discordant feature. In contrast to a disenchanted and less heroic image of the migrant who lives abroad, we notice the more or less implicit reaffirmation of a tantalizing celebrative representation of the “elsewhere”, the destination countries. We argue that this social representation plays a significant

role in perpetuating the myth of the “elsewhere” that is further nourished by the journalists who consider their audience not interested or receptive:

“Even when the articles turn the attention to the migrants life in Europe and their problems in order to raise awareness among the Senegalese people concerning what the emigration means, this choice is considered as a form of propaganda fostered by the *toubab* in order to discourage emigration: people do not believe it” (Interview with the Senegalese Press Agency at Dakar, 14.07.00 [Marfaing 2003: 58]).



As K. Gardner (2005) maintains, the migrants, the narratives about them as well as the images about foreign countries often do not foster only transformations in the sending and destination contexts, but become metaphors for thinking about these social and cultural changes, which characterize the local contexts themselves. Starting from these considerations, in this work we have tried to show how the phenomenon of pirogue migrations becomes a useful lens through which to grasp the changes of Senegalese society, the ways and the contents that inform the social representations of the “migrant”.

Within an ethno-anthropological perspective, the emic analysis of the phenomenon of pirogue migrations has placed greater attention on the role of those who do not leave Senegal, and on the local dimension of migrations. By focusing the attention on the urban contexts of M’bour and Saly, the analytical perspective put forward by M. De Bruijn *et al.* (2001) on the concept of “mobility” has allowed us to understand how the migratory dimension is historically part of the fishermen’s activities. The development of a locally specific “culture of migration” is rooted in the local meanings that are attributed to these activities.

The interpretation of the pirogue migrations as a phenomenon of continuity within the long history of a “culture of mobility” has proven to be a fruitful reading key to scale down the improper and misleading descriptions of the Senegalese media. The adoption of a diachronic perspective has allowed us to understand better the choices, the motivations and the experiences of all those migrants quickly labelled as “contemporary adventurers”. They are not crazy kamikaze but people who strive for a social recognition that is always more difficult and hampered by the socio-economic transformations characterizing contemporary Senegal.

Looking at the social construction of “Senegalese migrant”, the representations of *Modou modou* appear as the result of a process historically embedded in the dynamics of everyday life. In particular, we argue that the pirogue migrations have triggered a shift in the social representation of the “Senegalese migrant”. The description of the “Senegalese migrant” seems to be more realistic and less celebratory, compared to a previous mostly

surrounded by a sense of ambivalence (Riccio 2001, 2005). This transformation, occurring at discursive and social level, coexists with media representations (in particular TV representations) that reproduce discordant images in the relationship between the migrants and their contexts of destination. In fact, an idealized representation of the latter endures with a less heroic image of the emigrants who appear as socially excluded outsiders in both origin and destination societies.

The decision to migrate “elsewhere” is not inscribed in a stereotyped image of Europe as a global and culturalized *El Dorado*; this widespread idea is ethnographically questioned by the narratives of its protagonists. We suggest that a greater understanding may spring up from the examination of the relationship between mobility, space and imagination (degli Uberti 2011b). Major attention should be devoted to the analysis of the role played by the imagination in the social construction of the desire to migrate as well as of the representations of Europe as real or imaginary destination of the migratory travel. The dominant social representation of Europe needs to be disaggregated and rethought through a deeper understanding of the processes of social interaction from which it springs. The study of the discourses and daily practices of migrants and non-migrants in the urban areas of M’bour and Saly suggest that understanding of the phenomenon of the pirogue migrations is bound to multiple local variables.

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## ABSTRACT

From 2005 the waves of the Atlantic Ocean that shatter on the Senegalese coasts, are ploughed by about ten thousand migrants in pirogues (most of them Senegalese) who set off for the Canary Islands, risking their lives to “*gagner l’Europe*”. In Senegal the phenomenon of boat migrations has triggered a remarkable production of images and discourses. In assuming movements as an exception, in the mass-media and official discourses the pirogue migrant is portrayed as a “kamikaze”, a victim or a “naive adventurer” who is driven to leave by the imagination of an idyllic European “elsewhere”, or by the desire to achieve the same economical wealth displayed by returning migrants. Conversely, numerous ethnographic studies suggest that for millions of Africans being mobile appears rather a “way of life”, a part of their daily experience, implying more than just movement of people in geographical space alone (De Bruijn *et al.* 2001). Drawing from the analysis of the ethnographic data collected in Dakar and in the urban areas of M’bour-Saly, in this paper we suggest that boat migrations could be better understood by examining both the manifold forms of social representations of the migrant within Senegalese society, and the meanings conveyed by Senegalese media and narratives of migrants and non-migrants. The adoption of an historical perspective on the study of M’bour’s migratory context will allow us to retrace a locally specific “culture of migration” and underling its importance in order to deconstruct macro-analytical interpretations, and question the official rhetoric on “clandestine migrations” from Senegal.

## RÉSUMÉ

*Victimes de leurs rêveries ou héros d’un jour ? Représentations médiatiques, histoire locale et récits quotidiens sur les migrations piroguières du Sénégal.* — À partir de 2005, les vagues de l’océan Atlantique qui se brisent contre les côtes du Sénégal sont traversées par une dizaine de milliers de migrants en pirogues (pour la plupart sénégalais) qui font route vers les îles Canaries, au péril de leur vie, « pour gagner l’Europe ». Au Sénégal, le phénomène des migrations en pirogue a déclenché une production remarquable d’images et de discours. En supposant l’idée de « mouvement » comme une « exception », dans les mass-médias et les discours officiels, le migrant en pirogue est décrit comme un « kamikaze », une victime ou un « aventurier naïf » qui est poussé à partir par l’imagination d’un idyllique « ailleurs » européen, ou par le désir de réaliser une richesse économique affichée par les migrants de retour. En revanche, de nombreuses études ethnographiques montrent que, pour des millions d’Africains mobiles, apparaît plutôt un « mode de vie », une partie de leur expérience quotidienne, ce qui implique plus qu’une simple circulation de personnes dans le seul espace géographique (De Bruijn *et al.* 2001). S’appuyant sur l’analyse des données ethnographiques recueillies à Dakar et dans les zones urbaines de M’bour-Saly, cet article soutient que les migrations en pirogue pourraient être mieux comprises en examinant à la fois les multiples formes de représentations sociales du migrant dans la société sénégalaise et les significations véhiculées par les médias sénégalais et les récits des migrants et des non-migrants. L’adoption d’une perspective historique dans l’étude du contexte migratoire de M’bour nous permettra de retracer une « culture de la migration » localement spécifique et de souligner son importance afin de déconstruire les interprétations macro-analytiques, et de remettre en question les rhétoriques officielles sur les « migrations clandestines » sénégalaises.

Keywords/*mots-clés*: Senegal, M’bour, culture of migration, elsewhere, mass-media, pirogue migrations, representations/*Sénégal, M’bour, culture de la migration, l’Ailleurs, mass-médias, migrations piroguières, représentations.*