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A Family Mobilization for Migration to Europe from Casamance, Senegal

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The ratio between basic salaries in Western Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa is at least of a factor ten. Many young Africans therefore dream of emigrating to Europe. However, the air route remains a privilege reserved to members of elite families: to take a plane one needs a visa for most European countries. Without a visa, the only two possibilities are the sea route via coastal navigation along the African coast and the land route through the Sahara. These are the very dangerous and uncertain routes that tens of thousands of migrants nevertheless take each year. This article examines the case of a family of small-scale subsistence farmers in Casamance, the Southern region of Senegal. It shows how this family of 42 persons decided to send one of its members to try to enter France illegally. How they chose the migrant, how they collected the necessary funds, and what happened during the two attempts. This detailed case study gives an idea of the steps taken each year by tens of thousands of other families in Africa who try sending one of their sons across European borders.

Introduction

Despite decades of efforts to reduce the immense wealth gaps between the countries of the ‘North’ of the planet and those of the ‘South’, these gaps are hardly decreasing (Journal Du Net 2022). According to World Bank data (Banque Mondiale 2022), the order of magnitude for many countries is one to ten (for example, between France and Algeria: \$3,524 versus \$334; or between the United States and Ecuador: \$5,492 versus \$508). However, for most of the French-speaking countries of West Africa, which are among the poorest in the world and whose reference in Europe is often France, this ratio is much larger. For Example, one to 18 for the Ivory Coast, and one to thirty for Senegal (and even one to 82 for Madagascar).

For a long time, these considerable differences remained confidential. They are now not only public, but known to

all, including in the poorest countries. They translate into considerable gaps in living standards and life chances; gaps that the globalization of the media—and more precisely the Americanization of television soap operas—has made public and well-known in all countries, or at least in most cities of the “South” of the planet. Inevitably, such differences make people dream; and many young people in the so-called “developing” countries want to at least “go there”, not only to live better, but also to be able to help their family back home to get out of the endemic poverty by sending monthly remittances.

France is only a few hours away by plane from most of the French-speaking sub-Saharan African countries. One can find plane tickets from Dakar to Paris for €500 or €600: a very high amount, but not inaccessible. However, the problem is not only the cost of the plane ticket, it

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is in getting a visa in due form. The French authorities, like those of other European countries, have become aware of the immense attractiveness of the European standard of living and have become very demanding in the requirements for obtaining a visa. In practice, they have chosen to practically close their borders to mass immigration from the 'Deep South'.

With the air route now heavily guarded, there are still two other ways for young Africans to reach Europe's borders (and to try to cross them illegally): the sea route and the land route. Both are extremely dangerous. In fact, there is very little research in the scientific literature on either of these routes, and perhaps even less in the way of accounts by young adventurers of what they experienced while following either of them. However, as a Senegalese PhD who did my doctoral studies in France on the emigration routes of young Senegalese from Casamance to France, I have collected a certain number of these accounts.¹ These accounts, as well as my observations, challenge preconceived notions.

It is often imagined that young Senegalese (or other sub-Saharan Africans) who attempt to emigrate to Europe—or to Canada—leave because of a very personal decision, even without the knowledge of their parents and relatives. However, during my research, I met several young people who had left with the full support of their families; and it is precisely one of these examples that I want to present here. After presenting the political, economic, and social context of Casamance, I introduce the Diamanka family and show how emigration to Europe is a family investment. Secondly, I will examine the different ways of emigrating from Senegal to a Western European country, the reasons for Oumar's migration, and the choice of the migrant within the Diamanka family. Finally, I will analyze Oumar's two attempts to reach Europe by land and sea. These attempts both ended in failure.

Rationale for the Case Study

The case study of a poor rural family from Casamance living in Saré Bidji,² which we will refer to throughout this article as the Diamanka³ family, is justified for several reasons. First, the choice of this family is explained by the bond of trust that I had established with them during my various field investigations. This bond of trust allowed me to investigate for several years with the help of family members who were very open, collaborative, and always ready to answer my questions. I discussed and lived with the family for a long time during my fieldwork investigations, sometimes sharing lunch with them and going with them to their fields to make direct observation.

Additionally, the Diamanka family was chosen because it was one of the 23 families that had supported the migration attempt(s) of one of their children, to no

avail. Of the 30 families I interviewed in my study, I found only seven cases where the migrant successfully made it to Europe, an average of one in four attempts. This statistic highlights how there are many more failed attempts at family supported illegal emigration. This Diamanka family is the image of tens of thousands of families who, each year, mobilize their resources to send one of their children to Europe in hopes of improving their living conditions and to be able to get out of the ambient and chronic poverty that strikes many families in Casamance, Senegal and many other African countries. Therefore, presenting the case study of the Diamanka family is particularly interesting and extremely rich in terms of understanding the decision-making process on the choice of the migrant and the mobilization of the resources necessary for the journey.

Review of the Literature

The literature on illegal migration from African countries suggests that the mobilization of funds for the journey is of two types: individual and family mobilization.

The choice of the Diamanka family was also guided by the fact that, even though this family is poor and lives essentially from agriculture and livestock, it managed, with the help of all the members, to finance two emigration attempts of one of their children (Oumar). I wanted to understand how a family that did not have the economic resources to allow one of its members to legally emigrate to Europe still managed to find and mobilize the money necessary to carry out a project of illegal migration.

In his study on illegal migration in Morocco, Mohamed Khachani (2008) shows that

recourse to personal savings is frequent. Nearly two thirds (65%) of migrants stated that their migration project was financed by personal savings from work. 71% stated that they benefited from family assistance (74% of men and 58% of women), 22% from friends (21% of men and 28% of women). 23% used loans (27% of men and 9% of women). (11)

Other authors, such as Nehara Feldman, Stéphanie Lima, and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps (2020), highlight the idea that "as a general rule, the departure from the Kayes region (Mali) of a migrating family member responds to a family strategy. This is true for both male and female departures. It also shows that departure abroad is almost systematically carried out within families that already have members living outside the village who can cover the expenses related to departure. While a man's departure is primarily intended to engage in gainful work and send money back to the family behind, women's departure is initially defined as a practice aimed at assisting another family member (a sister, an aunt, a husband, etc.)" (Feldman et al. 2020).

In the case of legal migration, most often by air, Doudou Diéye Gueye (2003) studied in his doctoral dissertation the mechanisms and strategies used by nationals of the Senegal River Valley to make possible the migratory ambitions of one of their community members. His work highlights the existence of different types of mobilization: community mobilization, family mobilization, and purely individual mobilization (Gueye 2003). Community mobilization refers to the various strategies implemented by an entire village to gather resources to send one of its members to Europe or Canada. Family mobilization refers to the strategies implemented by a family, nuclear or extended, to finance the trip of one of its members; the author shows that these family mobilizations can take the form of either donations or loans, depending on the structure of the family studied. Finally, there is individual mobilization, in which the migrant himself finances his trip (Gueye 2007).

As I have noted, legal migration is reserved for children from families with substantial financial means. In the case of illegal migration, it seems that community mobilization is absent (or very rare): given the high risk of failure (through the death of the migrant, his or her capture for the purpose of exploitation (as is the case in Libya), or through arrest and forced return to the country of departure), in no village would the population take the risk of investing all of its meager resources in such an adventurous, dangerous journey with such an uncertain outcome. Therefore, when it comes to illegal immigration, there would only be family mobilizations or individual projects (Ngom 2017).

Indeed, illegal migration is often perceived as an individual adventure (Fontanari 2019). However, my empirical research, carried out through long-term observations and narrative interviews, tends to refute this ‘individualistic’ vision. On the contrary, they show how illegal migration is most often based on a family project that has been carefully thought out by family groups of up to fifty people and pursued over several years.

The Political, Economic, and Social Context of Casamance

Casamance is the region located in the south of Senegal. It is composed of three sub-regions: the Atlantic coast, where its capital Ziguinchor is located; and two regions located inland, including the one—the furthest from the coast—where the Diamanka family lives. Separated for the most part from the rest of Senegal by the Gambia enclave (see Table 1), Casamance saw the birth and development of a separatist movement, the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC), forty years ago. The origins of the conflict go back to December 1982: a peaceful march was organized by the MFDC towards the government of Ziguinchor. However, this march was bloodily repressed by the Senegalese authorities,

who also made numerous arrests, including that of the movement’s leader, Abbé Augustin Diamacoune Senghor. The movement’s supporters fled and found refuge in the forest of this region, where they set up a rebellion movement aiming at the independence of Casamance, thus plunging the region into a situation of “neither war nor peace” instability (Marut 2010).

In addition to this situation of political instability, the economic and social context in Casamance is not the best because of the prevailing poverty that primarily hits rural families. This is evidenced by the incidence of poverty in the three regions that make up Casamance: it remains higher than the national average (46%). In 2011, the incidence of poverty in the Ziguinchor region was estimated at 66%, 76% in the Kolda region (where the Diamanka family lives) and 68% in the Sédhiou region (ANSD 2013). The poverty line is higher there than in any other region of Senegal, and a family there lives on an average of €3 or €4 per day, or about €100 per month. While this figure alone does not consider self-consumption, which is obviously very important in traditional peasantry not only in Senegal but throughout the world, €3 or €4 per day compared with what a young person established in Europe could send per month (tens or even hundreds of euros) gives an idea of the importance of “remittances” (the money that one of the sons or daughters who emigrated to Europe periodically sends to their family). It is therefore easy to understand why some parents mobilize a sizable part of their resources to finance the migration project of one of their children, despite the considerable dangers that the journey presents.

Because of the extremely precarious economic and social situation, especially for the young people of this region, and the situation of political instability, emigration is the most credible alternative for success, despite the risks involved. Many migrants will try to go by sea in a fully loaded pirogue⁴ to try to reach the European coast. They usually do so from the island of Djogué or the island of Carabane, which are fishing villages located in Casamance, where they crowd into dugout canoes and travel under very risky conditions, driven, however, by a mad desire to reach the European continent. The journey by coastal navigation will take, if all goes well, almost two weeks. Others will attempt to travel overland across the Sahara Desert: from Casamance they travel to Mali, then on to Burkina Faso, then to Niger, and then up north across the Sahara to Algeria, from where they hope to reach Europe, in particular Spain (or its African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla).

Introducing the Diamanka Family

The Diamanka family lives in Saré Bidji, in the region of Kolda, in Upper Casamance. Its 42 members live in a large house composed of several huts. It is not a “nuclear” family, but an extended family of three generations,

characteristic of the traditional family in Senegal. The Diamanka family consists of the grandfather, here (re) named Al Hassane; his ten living children and their spouses, and their 21 children; a total of 18 men and 24 women. The main economic activities of the family are agriculture and livestock. The family has a herd of 18 dairy cows, 13 sheep, and 11 goats.

This family has always been able to ensure its survival thanks to its agricultural activities, some of which it sells to meet non-food needs. Most of what the members of this extended family produce and consume is therefore a closed circuit: they consume what they have produced. However, they also sometimes must make important purchases from outside. These are mainly based on the organization of a particular type of tontine that we will call a "private tontine". The (universal) principle of tontine is that well known individuals bound together by a moral contract undertake to pay a certain sum at regular intervals, the total of which (called a levy) will be given to each participant in turn; this will enable him or her to make an expenditure (preferably an investment, or certain types of consumption) whose means he or she would never have the possibility to save. Thus, the objective of a tontine is the collection of sufficient resources to allow the realization of an individual project: each in turn, of course. The money from tontines is also used to prepare ceremonies such as marriages, or to finance all or part of a participant's trip.

Illegal migration represents a high and risky investment, be it individual or family, and there is a case for tontine. However, this will not be a classic tontine; rather, we will call it a "private tontine". By this term we mean all the contributions that are made on a recurring basis according to a certain regularity within the family sphere. Unlike traditional tontines, here the contribution is perceived as a symbolic contribution by each family member, according to his or her resources, for (as an example) the realization of a temporary emigration project seen as a family investment.

Emigration to Europe as a family investment

We have seen that in Senegal, a family of small farmers lives essentially on self-consumption, spending an average of only €2 to €4 per day on purchases (about €100 per month). This gives an idea of the importance, for these poor rural families, of the remittances that young immigrants in Europe periodically send to their families. A recent IOM report (2018) shows that the amounts of remittances sent by the Senegalese diaspora have grown considerably in recent years. Their volume has increased from \$233 million in 2000 to \$925 million in 2006, then to \$1.6 billion in 2013, to reach \$2.2 billion in 2021, for a total of 930 billion FCFA per year over the last ten years (2008–2017). The share of these transfers in Senegal's GDP rose from 6% in 2001 to 8.6% in 2007 and 13% in 2017. The countries of origin of remittances

are numerous; but the top contributors are France (\$647 million in 2017) and Italy (\$425 million), followed by Spain (\$302 million) (IOM 2018).

These figures make it possible to understand why, despite the considerable dangers of the journey, some families mobilize a large part of their resources to finance the migration project of one of their children (only one, because often only one child per family migrates). The Diamanka family spends only 2,500FCFA (€4) per day on the markets, or 75,000FCFA (€120) per month. However, they have a herd of animals, and can therefore sell one of these animals if necessary (although they are part of their productive capital). A dairy cow can be sold on local markets for sums ranging from 250,000FCFA (€380) to 800,000FCFA (€1220).

Emigration Options

Legal emigration (by air) from Senegal to Western Europe

In Casamance, as in other regions of Senegal, legal emigration to a Western European country by air is only possible if the migrant (or his or her family) has a certain amount of money, not only to pay for the ticket,⁵ but above all to meet the entry conditions required by European countries. If not, air passage is impossible and one must turn to the land or sea route, both of which are dangerous and uncertain.

Emigration by air implies the strict control of administrative documents. Obtaining an immigration visa is a complex matter, and the procedures to be followed are far from being within the reach of all migrants. To begin with, the applicant must provide proof of accommodation in the country of destination: a rental agreement or proof of accommodation with a relative or friend. He or she must also pay the consular fee, which will not be refunded if the visa application is rejected. This tax is not a negligible amount: for a French visa application from Senegal, for example, the consular tax is between €50 and €99 depending on the applicant's profile (student, "ordinary applicant"), the expected duration of his or her stay (short or long stay) and the reason for the trip (studies, tourism, health, etc.). It is not so much the application fee that is an obstacle for applicants, but mainly the fact that they must certify that they have the resources in advance to cover their expenses during their stay (Ngom 2017). For members of wealthy families, justifying these resources is easy; but for everyone else, it is a highly significant obstacle.

Another strategy, when you belong to a rich family, is to buy a visa from a network that will take care of making and providing all the supporting documents. The price is high: it ranges from one to three million CFA francs (about €1,500 to €4,500), or even more. Either way, you

must pay a lot of money to get a visa. For members of wealthy families, this can be done without much difficulty but for all others, the bar is set too high.

Illegal Emigration from Senegal to Western Europe

As the crow flies—as they say so well—the distance between Dakar and Barcelona is 3,500 kilometers; it is 4,500 kilometers between Dakar and Paris. However, these figures have little meaning for the migrants. Those who cannot fly have to travel for weeks on dangerous roads and find ways to cross several African countries before facing the final and most difficult test: crossing a border into Europe. For most migrants to Europe (those who have no rich family to help them), their options are either this land route or the sea route where they would travel in overcrowded makeshift dugout canoes sailing day and night along the African coast for over a week.

Some Senegalese migrants will prefer the land route by passing through Niger, then Morocco or Algeria, or Tunisia or they will try to follow the long Mediterranean coastline, crossing Turkey and entering Europe via Greece. In any case, they will have to avoid Libya, now a stateless country having given over to the powers of armed gangs that capture migrants and reduce them to slavery. Other Senegalese migrants opt for passage by sea: either via the high seas to the coast of the Canary Islands (which are Spanish); or along the African coast to Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish enclaves within Morocco; or even to Lampedusa, the Italian island closest to the North African coast.

Such is the range of choices today; but this was already the case some twenty years ago when Oumar set out on his first journey to Europe.

Oumar's reasons for migrating

Poverty and the lack of prospects for improving the family situation were the structural causes of Oumar's emigration project. However, the main reason that triggered his migration was the words of his older brother Youssouf to their grandfather and head of the family, Al Hassane. Indeed, another family living in Saré Bidji had one of its members living in Europe, more precisely in Brescia, Italy. This emigrant sent his family 200,000FCFA (€305) every month. By comparison, the Diamanka family lived mainly on self-consumption and could only gather a few euros per day, about €120 per month, for their external purchases. Under these conditions, the idea of sending one of their own to Europe appeared highly beneficial, of course on condition that he would succeed.

The migration project: object of family discussion and debate

In the case of Oumar, the migration project and its financing were imagined, discussed, and specified over two years within the Diamanka family. During this

long period, the project was constantly thought out, reflected upon, and debated within the family under the leadership of the head of the family, Grandfather Al Hassane. Considerable effort was invested in the agricultural fields to ensure high yields and abundant harvests. This preparation enabled the family to be self-sufficient in food, and thus to sell the surplus produced to accumulate funds for the trip to Europe. The efforts made by all members of the extended family were not without ulterior motives: the underlying idea, shared by all, was that once his trip was successful, Oumar could improve the family's living conditions by sending money every month. As D. Gueye writes, "In this specific register of family mobilization, it has the appearance of a form of economic investment, especially since any departure within the family responds above all to an economic strategy whose expected result would be to see the immigrant for whom one has mobilized actively invest in return in the realization of certain needs of the family production unit" (Gueye 2007, 15).

The Choice of the Migrant in the Diamanka Family

In the case of the Diamanka family, it was the head of the family, Al Hassane, who chose the migrant. Al Hassane chose Saliou, the eldest of the Diamanka family. However, after talking to a returning migrant and realizing the dangers of the journey, especially by sea, Saliou abandoned the plan to leave for Europe. Oumar, his younger brother, then offered to make the journey for him, and was strongly supported by Al Hassane. Here is how he describes this decisive moment:

(It was) my older brother who was supposed to go. But he refused to go (...). When the whole family got together, my grandfather designated me to go abroad and work to help the family. My family knew that if I could make the trip, I could help them. In fact, my older brother had gone to see an immigrant who had come on vacation (from Europe) to talk to him. He saw how the guy came back. Then my older brother came home to talk to my grandfather about it, to explain the story of this successful immigrant who was making a good living in Spain. He wanted to go there, so my grandfather told him to go and ask the immigrant how the trip was. And when the immigrant explained it to him, he came back to my grandfather to tell him that he was giving up, because he had seen the way the immigrant had explained the journey to him: the journey seemed very difficult. From that point on, since my older brother did not want to go, my grandfather designated me to go. (Interview conducted in Saré Bidji on July 18, 2014)

In fact, in this family, if the choice of the migrant was made by the head of the family Al Hassane, it was done at the cost of many heated discussions and disagreements between him and one of Oumar's aunts, Aby. Aby was vehemently opposed to the trip and stood up to the other family members and to the grandfather and head

of the Al Hassane family. In the local culture, decisions are normally made only after a consensus has been reached. As Aby did not agree, there was no consensus. Of course, she was a woman; and according to tradition, in some villages at least, a man’s words and arguments have more value and weight than a woman’s when it comes to making certain decisions. Aby was allowed to speak, and she was able to present her point of view; but only because she was of an advanced age. If she had been younger, she would not have had a say in a decision made by the main authority, here embodied by the men of the family but especially by the grandfather. Even though she had a say, the last word went to the head of the family, Al Hassane.

Oumar’s grandfather was able to convince Oumar’s aunt not only of the need to send a young family member, but also that it was Oumar. Families usually decide to send one of their younger adults, as they believe that this will allow him to work for a longer period in the host country, and thus send money for a longer period. In this region, it is customary for most decisions concerning the entire family to be discussed collectively first, even, and especially if there are differences of opinion and disagreement among its members (Ngom 2019). The grandfather eventually succeeded in persuading Oumar’s aunt—and other initially unconvinced family members—to nominate Oumar and mobilize the resources necessary for his trip. Later, he also managed to convince the rest of the extended family of the need to use the money received from selling the harvest to continue financing Oumar’s overland journey.

Oumar’s Two Attempts to Reach Europe

Overland

Any illegal migration trip requires a certain amount of money beforehand. My detailed study of thirty cases identified two main types of financing: either by family mobilization, as in the case of Oumar, or by individual mobilization. This implies an in-depth analysis of the different actions undertaken both by a family or family network and by a migrant themselves.

In September 2000, a first harvest sale allowed the Diamanka family to raise the sum of 50,000FCFA (€76) to allow Oumar to make the trip from Saré Bidji to Dakar, from where he would continue his journey. Oumar left for Dakar on 6 September 2000; and once he arrived, he had to wait for the peanut harvest to be sold before he could continue his journey. He stayed in Dakar for six months (from September 2000 to February 2001). There, he lived in the Grand Yoff neighborhood with one of his uncles. In February 2001, after the sale of the peanut crop, the family sent him an additional 350,000FCFA (€534). At this point, the two sums of money he had received totaled (76+534=) €610. This was the tentative budget for his trip, but it had already taken seven months to earn and save it.

One of the Diamanka family’s strategies was to send money to Oumar little by little, so that he could continue his journey step by step. This is not the case for the urban families I interviewed for my project: in their case, the amount of money needed for the trip is mobilized in one go and given to their migrant.

But it is not only this strategy that is interesting in the Diamanka case; it is also that the realization of the project of emigration to Europe mobilized the lively energies of all the members of this poor rural family. In the vocabulary proposed by Catherine Delcroix (2013), it is not only its objective resources (its savings) that the family mobilized to invest them in the migration travel, but also the *subjective resources*⁶ of each of her members, who had to redouble their energies in working harder in the fields to achieve a harvest surplus that would provide additional income.

Oumar left Dakar with 400,000FCFA (€610) in his pocket. After the sale of the crops, he received a third payment of 200,000FCFA (€305), then a fourth payment of 320,000FCFA (€488) from the sale of the crops. Since his older brother Youssouf had also sent him 150,000FCFA (€229), his trip was finally financed with a total 1,070,000FCFA (€1,633). Looking at the amounts received by Oumar during his trip, we can see that as he progressed, the amounts sent by his family became more and more important.

Table 1: Financing of Oumar’s First Attempt. Source: Field survey, Ngom 2014

Source of funding	Amounts	Dates
First tranche from the sale of crops	50,000FCFA (€76)	Sept. 2000
Second tranche from the sale of crops	350,000FCFA (€534)	Feb. 2001
Money sent by Youssouf	150,000FCFA (€229)	Feb. 2001
Third tranche from the sale of crops	200,000FCFA (€305)	Feb. 2001
Fourth tranche from the sale of crops	320,000FCFA (€488)	Sept. 2001
Total	1,070,000FCFA (€1,633)	

What was Oumar's journey? In September 2000, he took a car at the Kolda bus station to go to Dakar. He paid 12,000FCFA (€18) for the Kolda-Dakar trip. Once in Dakar, he stayed there for six months, as mentioned above, while his family sent him the 350,000FCFA (€534) from the sale of the crops. After receiving the money, Oumar continues his journey: he returned eastward to the region of Tambacounda. From this border region between Senegal and Mali, he continued due east to Bamako—the capital of Mali—where he spent three weeks in transit, before continuing his journey to Burkina Faso, then Niger, and finally Algeria, where he arrived in November 2001. It is in this country that he was intercepted at the border and repatriated to Senegal.

If one reconstructs Oumar's journey with the help of a map, it becomes clear that he did not follow the most direct route. To get to Tangier by land from Dakar, for example, one would have to go directly north, cross Mauritania and then the former Western Sahara—a very dangerous region—enter Morocco, and then go up again to, say, Tangier. The distance from Dakar to Tangier by road is more than 3,300 kilometers. But Oumar took a different route. From his village, once he received a first sum of money (50,000FCFA, that is €76) he left his village to Kolda, and from Kolda to Dakar, where he stayed for six months waiting to receive money to continue his journey. When he received 350,000FCFA, he set off, not towards the North, but towards the East and the interior of Africa. His first target was Bamako, the capital of Mali. Once in Bamako, he met other migrants and was told by one of the smugglers that he should try to obtain Malian papers if he wanted to continue his journey.

The smuggler gave him the phone number of another contact, telling him that he had to say he was calling on his behalf for this contact to agree to make him (false) Malian papers. Naturally, he had to pay for them, so Oumar called his family to inform them. His older brother Youssouf sent him the sum of 150,000FCFA (€229) to Bamako in the name of the whole family. After purchasing his false papers, Oumar continued his journey to the interior of Africa. Once in Niger, he headed north to try to reach Algeria. He finally reached the Algerian border in November 2001. It had been a year since he had left his village, and six months since he had been on the road.

Upon his arrival in Algeria, Oumar was intercepted by the Algerian police and immediately repatriated by plane to Senegal, more precisely to the Dakar region. He then decided to stay in Dakar while he collected money to leave. He stayed in Dakar for eight weeks, spending his nights in the train station: he did not want to live with his uncle anymore, because he did not want his uncle to be informed of his forced repatriation. In December 2001, after two weeks in Dakar and seeing no way out of his situation, he finally decided to call his grandfather to inform him that his trip had failed and to tell him about the second attempt he was planning to make, this time by sea.

By sea

After spending two and a half months in Dakar, Oumar left in December 2001. This time he decided to try to reach Europe by sea. He called Ousmane, a smuggler based in Elinkine, Casamance, whose number he had obtained through Ibrahima, one of his fellow travelers in the desert, also from the Kolda region. Elinkine is a fishing village located on the Casamance River, a little upstream from its mouth. At the time, Senegalese fishermen were beginning to realize that if you had a pirogue, there was more money to be made from people migrating to Europe than from fishing, especially since the giant factory ships that fished off the Senegalese coast (industrial fishing) were emptying the sea of its fish stocks.

To pay for the sea passage, however, Oumar had to pay in advance. After he called his family from Dakar, his brothers collected a first sum of 20,000FCFA (€30) which was sent to him in Dakar four days later. It was obtained through a private tontine that the family had organized immediately after receiving Oumar's call. It was mainly Oumar's four brothers who had mobilized to send him this sum, thanks to the savings they had made from the sale of fresh and curdled milk from their cows. Their wives gave the money from the sale of the milk back to their husbands (the brothers). Each of Oumar's ten siblings gave 2,000FCFA (€3) to the head of the family, Al Hassane, who then gave the money to Youssouf (Oumar's older brother) to send to Oumar by mail. Al Hassane added 2,000FCFA (€3) to pay for the postage. In Dakar, Oumar continued to receive money from his family to prepare for his second trip. Apparently, they were not angry with him for failing.

After receiving 20,000FCFA (€30), Oumar took a car from Dakar to Ziguinchor, the capital of Casamance and its main port on the Atlantic. Once in Ziguinchor, his family sent him a large sum of money, 394,000FCFA (€600), to pay the smuggler who organized the trip by pirogue from the island of Djogué, in Casamance. The Diamanka family had managed to raise this sum in only one month thanks to a strategy. His older brother Youssouf had managed to sell the best dairy cow the family owned for 300,000FCFA (€457).

However, this large sum was not enough to cover the costs of Oumar's new trip, as his grandfather Al Hassane explained to me during an interview.

I asked Youssouf to take the biggest dairy cow and sell it at the louma market. I told him that he could sell the cow at a reasonable price and that he should not sell it for cheap, even if we needed money urgently. I knew he would sell it at a good price: he is a good breeder, and he knows the value of a cow. But even if Youssouf was able to sell the cow for 300,000FCFA (€457), there was a shortfall of 94,000FCFA (€143) that I completed myself so that we could have the 394,000FCFA (€600). (Interview conducted in Saré Bidji on July 19, 2014)

Like the first time, it was Youssouf who sent him the 394,000FCFA (€600). After withdrawing the money, Oumar went to Elinkine to meet the smuggler, who discreetly took him to a house where other migrants were waiting patiently.

For his second attempt, Oumar was introduced to a network of smugglers who meticulously organized departures by pirogue from Casamance to the north of Morocco (or to the Canary Islands), and who had relays in each locality along the route: Djogu  islands, Carabane island, Mbour, Saint-Louis, and Dakar (Ngom 2020). Oumar was welcomed by a ferryman at the Elinkine bus station; he gave him the full price of his trip in advance. He stayed in Elinkine for two days with the other migrants before boarding with them on the third day at around 4:00 a.m. He and the others boarded a small pirogue that would take them to the island of Djogu , where the large pirogue was already prepared and stocked with diesel and food. Oumar embarked with 88 other migrants to reach Europe by coastal navigation.

For Oumar’s second emigration attempt, the money for the trip was not mobilized by the family step by step, unlike the first resources mobilization by the family. Also note that the money mobilized for Oumar’s first attempt (by land) was much larger (1,074,000FCFA) than for the second attempt (414,000FCFA), which was made by sea. For sea travel, the money is mobilized in one go. The comparison of the forms of resource mobilization thus highlights a considerable difference between the budgets invested in land and sea trips. This difference may be explained by the fact that in land journeys, the money is invested by the family as the migrant progresses, whereas in sea journeys, the entire cost of the journey must be paid before embarking.

Oumar’s pirogue journey lasted eleven days and nights. During the day the captain took advantage of the visibility to go as fast as possible. At night he continued to move forward, but more slowly. At the end of the eleventh night, after passing safely off Tangier, he entered the Strait of Gibraltar; and by dawn, Ceuta—the cape that faces the Bay of Gibraltar—was in sight. Oumar, like the other 88 passengers, thought for a while that he had finally reached the Promised Land. But the pirogue had been spotted by the coast

guard. The coast guard approached the boat to help it land, before the Red Cross took over and gave the migrants medicine and food. Then the migrants were taken to camps. Oumar stayed there for two weeks and then was repatriated back to Dakar. This was in January 2002.

Returning to one’s village, neighborhood, or even country after emigration failure can often be a painful experience for the migrant. However, their return will not be perceived in the same way if their attempt was financed by their family or if they financed it themselves. If the migrant self-financed their journey and has not been able to succeed in their migration project, the return is less painful because it was their money that they spent in vain to finance a journey that they knew in advance had little chance of succeeding. In this case, they have no explanation to give to anyone, since, in addition to having taken enormous risks in trying to emigrate by sea or land, it was their own money that they have lost.

It is not the same thing if the whole family believed in him and supported his emigration project. Most migrants whose attempts were supported by their family but who have been repatriated to their country of origin (thus having failed) can only experience shame, especially since the hopes of a whole family were resting on their success. The migrant must find plausible explanations for his or her failure and try to share them with parents and relatives who have no concrete experience of the journey and all its obstacles, risks, dangers, suffering, and difficulties. This was the case for Oumar. He returned to his family with his head down but was very pleasantly surprised by the warm welcome he received on his return. Everyone wanted to comfort him and show their joy at finding him safe and sound. The warmest were his mother, his aunt Aby, and his grandfather. No one mentioned the large sums of money invested in his two attempts to emigrate. His failure did not seem to have damaged his relationship to his family. After a few weeks of rest, Oumar resumed his agricultural and livestock activities along with his other brothers who remained in the village. He married two years later and now has three children. However, in my last interviews with Oumar in February 2021, I found that he still expresses the desire and the need to migrate again to meet the needs of his family.

Table 2: Financing of Oumar’s Second Attempt. Source: Field survey, Ngom 2014

Source of funding	Amounts	Dates
Private tontine of Oumar’s brothers	20,000FCFA (€30)	Dec. 2001
Sale of a dairy cow by the family	300,000FCFA (€457)	Dec. 2001
Savings of the head of the family Al Hassane	94,000FCFA (€143)	Dec. 2001
Total	414,000FCFA (€631)	

Conclusion

What does an in-depth study of the case of Oumar tell us? This young Senegalese, a member of a large family of peasant-breeders from Casamance living mostly from the products of its farm, volunteered to try to reach Europe. The hope was that if he succeeded, he could—with hard work—earn enough to send his family a real windfall of several hundred euros each month. Then his family would finally be able to get out of their precarious condition; like that other family in the same village whose son was already working in Italy.

Oumar's case is not an exception. Given the considerable gap in salaries between Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, there are undoubtedly millions of young Africans who dream of going to work in Europe, and tens of thousands who attempt to make the crossing. Without a visa, of course, because Europe has become a fortress whose borders have become almost impossible to cross legally (Pian 2016). As for Oumar, supported by his entire family who redoubled their efforts in the fields and sold their best dairy cow to finance his attempts, he tried twice to reach Europe's borders. First by land, crossing several borders (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria...) and then a second time by sea. Two attempts: two failures.

There are, at least to my knowledge, no precise statistics on the annual number of young Sub-Saharan Africans who attempt to reach Europe, and on the percentage of those who succeed (see, however: De Haas 2007; Beauchemin & Lessault 2009). This is hardly surprising, given that such migration is, as they say, "illegal". Migrants have excellent reasons for seeking to go unnoticed, whether by the European authorities themselves or by those of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean that collaborate with them. Of the 30 cases of attempted emigration to Europe that I studied, seven were successful, a percentage of about 25%: three failures for one success (Ngom 2019; Ngom 2020; Ngom 2021). One of the cases ended tragically with the death of the migrant. Again, this is only Senegal, which is only one of many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

The interest of case studies lies elsewhere: in the access they give to the way things happened concretely in each case. They show the local contexts, the structural situations of the actors involved, their projects, the strategies, the courses of action that they implement to try to achieve them, the resources mobilized, the obstacles encountered, and the interactions with other actors (Delcroix & Bertaux 2000). Each case is an intimate mixture of particular (or even singular, that is unique) elements and general elements, which are almost impossible to distinguish from one another if we remain with a single case. If we multiply the case studies, we will gradually see elements emerge whose recurrence from one case to another indicates the character generally (Bertaux 2016).

The in-depth study of Oumar's two attempts provides information on several aspects of the general flows of attempted emigration by young Africans to Europe. I would like to end this article by focusing on one of these aspects: the moral economy of the phenomenon (Thompson 1963). In other words, let us focus on the "economy" of the representations, convictions (or "values"), and feelings that underlie the actions undertaken; and first of all, their meaning for the actors involved, for there is no action that is not underpinned by a subjective meaning for the author of the action. If we place this reminder of Max Weber (1991 [1922]) in the temporal dimension, it appears that any attempt to emigrate to Europe, a typical example of a course of action inscribed in the long term, can only be supported by a project firmly anchored in the actor's subjectivity, however illusory it may be. So, what does the study of Oumar's case tell us about the moral economy of attempts to emigrate to an imagined Eldorado?

When Oumar embarks on the dangerous adventure, he carried the hopes of the whole family group. His older brother, after being informed of the dangers that awaited him, preferred to give up. His aunt Aby thinks that the risk is too great: the one who will leave could well lose his life, then so much the worse for the money: the top priority is life! But the pressure of the others is so strong that in the end, she can only give in. The family group therefore finances Oumar's trip: from the point of view of the economy of moral feelings of the Diamanka family, this means respect for his courage and confidence in his abilities. The group has invested in him, financially, but also morally: it has invested him with a great responsibility.

Oumar is aware of all this. Having left with no experience, he does everything he can. But the crossing of the Algerian border went badly, as it did with the other migrants with whom he traveled. Arrest. Forced repatriation to Dakar. One can imagine what he felt at that moment: a feeling of failure, but above all the shame of having failed, as if he had betrayed the trust of his family. He hid for more than a week, sleeping at the station like a homeless person.

Eventually however, he finds the strength to contact his family by phone. He admits having spent all their money in vain. However, if they are willing to finance him again, he is ready to try again—this time by sea. He cannot swim, does not have a life jacket. It is his life that would be at stake. Especially since the pirogues are cobbled together boats, unsuitable for navigation on the high seas (Ngom 2017). The smugglers load them to the brim with the passengers bailing frantically night and day (Ngom 2021). Finally, after eleven days of anguish, the pirogue docks in Morocco. Nobody has died on the way but the trip was for nothing: exhausted, the 88 passengers are given water, food, and medical care by an NGO. Then they are forcibly repatriated.

So, Oumar returns home with his head down. He expects the worst. He will certainly, he thinks, be the laughing stock of his brothers and sisters; maybe not of his parents, but of his uncles and aunts; and of Grandfather Al Hassane. How to survive this? Then, by some miracle, instead of scorn, he is welcomed by warm applause and tight hugs! He expected to be received like a *loser*; on the contrary, the whole family welcomes him as their hero! This is perhaps the most counterintuitive finding in this case study. It therefore deserves attention and an attempt at explanation.

The family group had invested a lot of hope (and effort) in the travels of one of their own to Europe but each member of the group also knew—if not consciously, at least subconsciously—that what Oumar was putting on the line to help his family was his own life. If he had drowned, for example, everyone would have borne some responsibility and guilt. Hence this mixture of moral feelings: the disappointment on learning of his first and second failures; but the joy, the unspeakable joy of finding him alive again, he whom we had thought lost more than once.

Is there not finally something of the Odyssey in what Oumar has done? As a poet born five hundred years ago said:

Happy who like Ulysses has made a beautiful journey
Or like the one who conquered the fleece
And then returned, full of use and reason,
To live between his parents the rest of his age.
(du Bellay, 1558)

Eventually, Oumar was able to benefit from funding to develop his activity and stay in Senegal, within a framework of policies designed to prevent people from leaving Casamance (Ngom 2020). This funding, obtained through the Endogenous Alternatives against Illegal Migration (ALEMI) project, allowed him to develop market gardening activities in his village (Saré Bidji) and to earn some money by selling his crop yields in the city (Kolda). Twenty years later, Oumar still regrets having failed in his two attempts to reach the European continent and expresses the ardent desire to make his dream come true again, or should I say the migratory dream of a whole family.

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Notes

¹ This article is based on the results of a doctoral research on family and individual mobilizations for the realization of emigration projects from Casamance to Europe. This

work combines different data collection techniques of a mainly qualitative nature: life stories, cross life stories, semi-structured interviews, and direct observation. I am a young Senegalese researcher who did a large part of my higher education in Senegal, particularly at the Assane University in Ziguinchor. Being originally from Senegal, I was thus able to establish a relationship of trust with my respondents. This relationship of trust enabled me to adopt a long-term approach to the follow-up of Oumar and his family to better understand the source of the money needed to carry out Oumar's two attempts to emigrate.

My surveys were conducted between 2013 and 2017 in Casamance, the large southern region of Senegal, with thirty migrants and their families, as well as with various actors of emigration: captains of "pirogues", fishermen, intermediary travel promoters, and marabouts). Among these thirty families, one member attempted to travel to Europe, but only seven were successful, an average of one in four attempts. This article presents an in-depth case study of the Diamanka family, which financed both attempts by one of its members, young Oumar. This family consists of Grandfather Al Hassane, his ten children and their spouses, and the 21 children of these ten couples, including Oumar.

I re-established contact with my respondents through the address book that I had already worked with during the preparation of my master's thesis. I thus reconnected with my surveys to gain access to families living in the Ziguinchor region. Other resource persons were located through my network of personal contacts. The strategy for approaching the contacts was a snow-ball effect. From the outset of my research, an approach based essentially on discourse and the dense description (Geertz 1998) of practices seemed more appropriate for my object of study. My approach focuses more on biographical data collection to reconstruct family histories (Delcroix & Bertaux 2000). Since I were based in France, more specifically in Strasbourg, I planned my fieldwork in Senegal, more specifically in Casamance, by making a trip each year of about two months to conduct my interviews and field observations. I also conducted interviews via Skype with some family members in the presence of my thesis director from Strasbourg. So, to speak, I continued to conduct interviews with this family and the others once I returned to Strasbourg. This shows that I kept in touch and continued to follow up with the family once I returned to Strasbourg. The Diamanka family, whose case study I present, was followed up with over time through repeated interviews with family members distributed as follows: I first interviewed Oumar, the migrant, then the paternal grandfather, the father, the mother, the paternal aunt, two paternal uncles, three sisters, and eight brothers. To avoid bias, the interviews were most often conducted in Fulani or Wolof and then translated into French (Ngom 2018).

² Saré Bidji is a rural community in the region of Kolda, in the upper Casamance in southern Senegal. It covers an area of 325 kilometers squared and its population was estimated, in 2013, at 16,753 inhabitants. The rural community of Saré Bidji is bordered to the west by the rural community of Diana Bah (Sédhiou region), to the east by the rural communities of Bignarabé and Ndorna, to the north by the rural community of Thiéty and to the south by the rural communities of Tankanto Escale and Dioulacolon. Most of the families living there manage to survive through agriculture and livestock.

- 3 To respect the anonymity of respondents, all the names and surnames cited in this article are first names and aliases.
- 4 The pirogues are boats carved with an axe in the trunk of a gigantic baobab tree, caïcédrot or cheese trees. They are, more precisely, makeshift boats made of motorboats that are normally used for coastal fishing and are often in poor condition. These pirogues are a kind of boat without a keel, not very stable, suitable to sail on a lake or a river with a peaceful course, but not to face the sea, its swell, even less its breakers, when it is overloaded. It is on this type of boat that the passages to Europe by sea are attempted.
- 5 The price of a plane ticket to Europe varies depending on the destination city. For example, a Dakar–Paris plane ticket (one way) costs about 200,000FCFA (€304); for a Dakar–Barcelona, it is about 180,000FCFA (€274); and for a Dakar–Milan, about 190,000FCFA (€290).
- 6 Subjective resources are “the physical, mental and moral energies that an individual develops at a given time in his or her life, as well as his or her knowledge and know-how that enable him or her to mobilize his or her energies, and even those of those close to him or her, wisely to meet his or her needs and carry out his or her projects” (Delcroix 2013).

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