



Irregular Migration in Senegal
Faith, Dreams and Human Smuggling
through the Desert and Sea

Doudou Gueye and Priya Deshingkar

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Migrating out of Poverty
University of Sussex, Arts B
Brighton BN1 9QN, United Kingdom
Email: migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk
Web: www.migratingoutofpoverty.org
Twitter: @MigrationRPC
Facebook: /migratingoutofpoverty
Blogger: migratingoutofpoverty.blogspot.com

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Abstract

The paper provides a bottom up view on human smuggling facilitation and the rationale behind extremely high-risk and complex irregular migration journeys from the Kolda region of Senegal across the Sahara and through the Atlantic sea. Interviews with aspiring, returned and deported migrants as well as smugglers and their associates provide insights into the organization of migration facilitation and how this is sustained in the current policy context. The research highlights the role of religious beliefs in preparing for and interpreting the experiences of harrowing journeys with a high risk of harm and death. The study also sheds light on hitherto under-recognised gendered aspects of the infrastructure of migration facilitation in Kolda: while migration is male dominated, women play a critical role in enabling migration by mobilising religious and financial support. The paper also discusses the differences in the social constructions of male and female migration and the differences in their social relations with smugglers and other actors involved in facilitating irregular migration. In conclusion the authors suggest that there is a need to revisit migration policies that are based on dissuading migrants through risk-awareness campaigns and heightened controls towards policies that address global structural inequalities that drive migration; develop a more accurate understanding of personal and family aspirations for change; create more opportunities for legal migration; initiate discourses on culturally sensitive topics such as female migration and failed migration, and the role of Islamic spiritual leaders (Marabouts).

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Executive Summary

This paper provides an up-to-date account of the irregular migration facilitation industry in the Casamance with a special focus on the Kolda region in Senegal. We consider the migration industry in its broadest sense to include a variety of state and non-state actors such as travel agents, money transfer operators, bus drivers, Islamic spiritual leaders (Marabout) and returned migrants. These actors had differing motives ranging from altruistic to profit making and the paper discusses their modes of operation. The research was conducted by the University of Assane Seck in Ziguinchor in collaboration with the University of Sussex. Kolda is an important point of origin for migrants travelling towards Libya and also a transit point for migrants from neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia.

The fieldwork was conducted in 2018 at a critical time when irregular migration had continued despite the externalisation of EU borders and growing criminalisation of migration facilitation. However, these control measures have not resulted in a drop in irregular migration as the migration industry has adapted to new controls. The aim of the research was to understand the social relations that underpin the facilitation of irregular migration and understand how it is organised against this backdrop of tightening controls on migration to Europe. The study is timely because recent research with an exclusive focus on the functioning of the migration industry and migrant smuggling in Senegal is scarce. Our objectives were to understand who the actors are, whether they are in complementary relationships or in competition, and if they work together or in isolation from each other. A multi-sited qualitative research approach was followed to gain deeper insights into these phenomena at origin and in transit.

The research was conducted in four regions: the Kolda region (Medina Yoro Foulla, Vélingara, Kolda departments). The Sédhiou region (Goudomp department, Tanaf locality). The Ziguinchor region (Oussouye department, Elinkine locality). Although not part of Casamance, the survey was also conducted in Tambacounda city as many brokers are located there. Interviews were conducted with aspiring (18), returned and deported migrants (26), the families of migrants (12), 6 smugglers and 4 civil society organisations.

As expected, the research showed that irregular high-risk migration is male dominated but it also revealed hitherto under-recognised gendered dimensions of the facilitation of irregular migration. We found that women play a critical role in organizing and supporting the migration of men through the mobilisation of financial and religious resources.

The migration decision in the Casamance is shaped by a number of intertwined factors including familial and individual aspirations for an improved standard of living. Other lesser known reasons for migration included migration to restore honour that had been lost by engaging in illicit activities locally such as timber smuggling.

The research adds to the scant literature on the role of religion and spirituality in shaping perceptions of risk and giving meaning to extreme suffering during dangerous migration

journeys. Details of the social relations and modes of interaction between different actors in the migration industry are discussed starting with Muslim religious leaders (Marabouts). Marabouts are extremely important in shaping the migration decision and mediating between God and migrants to help them cope with the risks and uncertainties that they encounter along the way. Rich accounts of the different kinds of intermediaries ranging from the local recruiters or cokseurs, the ghetto chiefs to the head smuggler or passeur are provided together with analysis of how they relate to each other and how the system works. The research shows that rather than clear hierarchies and structures with distinct boundaries between migrants and intermediaries, the situation is more fluid with people moving in and out of roles opportunistically.

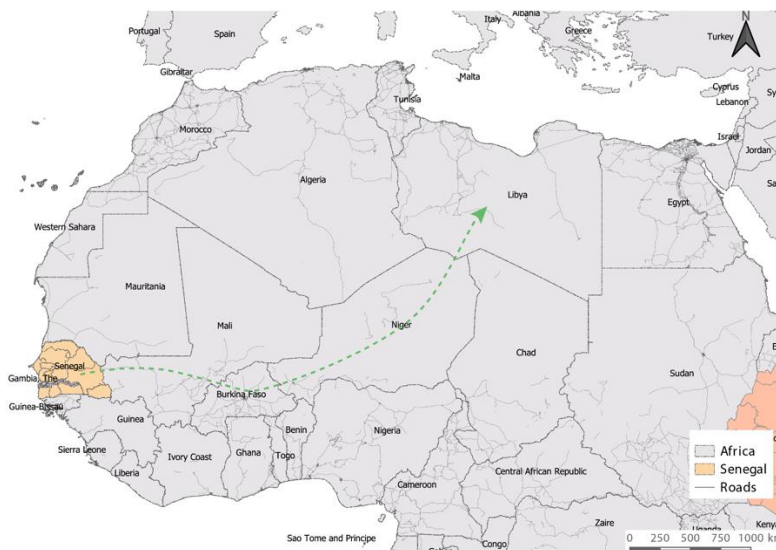
The paper contains accounts of harrowing journeys through the desert and sea as well as deportations back to Senegal. Failed migrants were preparing to depart again almost immediately and the reasons for that are discussed.

The paper concludes with four broad policy recommendations:

1. To improve the understanding of the structural inequalities within the global political economy that drive migration ;
2. To better understand broader changes that are needed in Senegalese society, beyond investment in agriculture and rural development, that would persuade young men and women away from high-risk migration ;
3. Undertake more analysis on the contribution of Senegalese migrants to receiving societies and use this as a basis for arguing for more legal channels for migration ;
4. Initiate community level conversations on sensitive and stigmatised topics such as failed migration, female migration, consulting Marabouts and migration risks.

1. Introduction

In the early 2000s, Senegalese nationals accounted for the largest proportion of irregular migrants intercepted in the Mediterranean¹. These irregular boat migrants who risked their lives to reach Europe were characterised as single, young men between 20 and 29 years of age belonging to the Mouride brotherhood and the Wolof ethnic group. In the intervening decade between those studies and this research, there has been a diversification of both routes and ethnicities migrating from Senegal in response to the changing policy context and the emergence of a more established migration industry. The accounts of migrants presented in this paper show that overland journeys via Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and onwards to Morocco or Libya are equally if not more important than the sea route via Mauritania towards Spain.



Credit: Reitumetse Selepe

Estimates from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicate that Senegal remained one of the top countries in West Africa sending migrants to Spain². While roughly 46 per cent of the migration from Senegal is to other countries within West Africa, mainly to Mauritania, the Gambia, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Niger, emigration to Europe has increased since 2016. The IOM “Migration Profile” of Senegal shows that the Casamance together with the Tambacounda region, account for nearly a fifth of Senegalese migration. There has been an

¹ Irregular migration to Spain, via Morocco or the Atlantic, was recorded at 2506 people in 2002, increasing to 19,176 in 2003, of which 76.6 percent were Senegalese (ACCEM 2006: 13, cited in Cross, 2009).

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/spain/latest-iom-study-migration-trends-senegal-explains-peak-arrivals-spain>

expansion of “departure zones” as regions that previously had low levels of migration have gradually become areas of high emigration.³

As routes and migration profiles have diversified, so have the infrastructures of migration mediation. This research provides an up-to-date account of the structure and functioning of the Senegalese migration industry under which we include a variety of non-state actors such as travel agents, money transfer operators, bus drivers, Islamic spiritual leaders (Marabout) and returned migrants. These include those whose motives are more profit oriented and those who are motivated by a combination of altruism and profit. The focus is on the relations between migrants and different individual and institutional actors and how they do or do not come together to navigate border controls and immigration authorities in Senegal and transit countries. The research also unpicks how migrants and the facilitators of irregular migration are affected by EU policy as well as global migration goals under the SDGs and the Global Compacts on migration implemented by the IOM in in Senegal as well as neighbouring countries.

The research was conducted in the Casamance with a focus on the Kolda region by the University of Assane Seck in Ziguinchor in collaboration with the University of Sussex. Kolda is an important point of origin for migrants travelling towards Libya and also a transit point for migrants from neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia. The fieldwork was conducted in 2018 at a critical time when irregular migration had continued despite the externalisation of EU borders and growing criminalisation of migration facilitation. The intensification of border controls was in evidence through sea patrols as well as legislation such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) Regional Strategy to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants in West and Central Africa (2015-2020). Information campaigns funded by the EU or its member states to dissuade migrants had also been implemented by the IOM since 2007. They were founded on the belief that migrants better informed by the risks of irregular migration would reconsider their plans. However, the investment and effort in these control measures has not resulted in a concomitant drop in irregular migration as the migration industry has adapted to new controls and “victims of trafficking” are notoriously difficult to identify on the ground. Another aim of the research was therefore to show how irregular migration is organised against this backdrop of tightening controls on migration to Europe.

Together with an increase in mobility into and out of Senegal, there have been two major shifts: increasing aspirations to migrate to Europe and a simultaneous decline in the economic and political situation in neighbouring countries (ANSD OIM 2018). The combination of these socio-political and economic developments as well as the difficulties in entering Europe have resulted in an increase in irregular migration (Cross, 2009; Pian, 2009; Ngom 2017; Tandian, 2019). It is now easier for aspiring migrants to pay smugglers than to wait for a positive answer from visa

³ Migration au Sénégal. Profil Migratoire 2018, OIM et ANSD, 2018. <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-au-senegal-profil-national-2018>

applications that they will never receive (Ngom, 2017). Furthermore, intense surveillance along migration routes has forced migrants and smugglers to resort to random and dangerous transport solutions (Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, 2005).

Despite the abundance of studies done on migration in Senegal, there is a dearth of recent research focusing exclusively on the functioning of the migration industry and migrant smuggling. The extant literature on migration facilitation is dated and it was felt that current information in such a rapidly changing context is essential. We sought to understand who the actors are, whether they are in complementary relationships, or in competition, and if they work together or in isolation from each other. We were interested in understanding the social relations between migrants and these actors and to what extent they facilitate or constrain his/her project. A multi-sited qualitative research approach was followed to gain deeper insights into these phenomena at origin and in transit.

The main aims of the research were to:

- Map the main migration routes and examine how migration is facilitated or hampered along different pathways and how this may vary by gender
- Explore how choices and decisions at the micro and meso levels at origin (in rural or urban areas), at points of transit, are shaped by religion, policy and economic circumstances.

2. Conceptual framework

In understanding the composition of the migration industry and the roles of different state and non-state actors in facilitating irregular migration, we draw on the large and diverse literature on the migration industry which has highlighted the role of multiple non-state actors in migration facilitation (Gammeltoft and Sorensen, 2013; McCollum and Findlay, 2018; Deshingkar et al, 2018; Xiang and Lindquist 2014 and Wee and Yeoh, 2019; Cranston et al, 2017). Our research builds on other scholarly work which has examined particular functions of the migration industry. These include the facilitation of clandestine crossing of borders (Schapendonk, 2018; Zack et al, 2019); enticing migrants into irregular migration arrangement (Spaan and Van Naerssen, 2018; Beech, 2018), and promoting glamorous lifestyles to entice them (Fekadu et al, 2019; Koh and Wissink, 2018 in Cranston et al, 2017). Prior research on clandestine boat migration in Senegal establishes the importance of the indigenous knowledge of local fishermen about the dangers of the sea and their role in pirogue⁴ migration to Europe (Pastore et al, 2006; Manzoni, 2007; Carling, 2007; Poeze, 2010). These studies resonate with our research which shows that culturally embedded brokers and smugglers are critical to the operation as they possess an understanding

⁴ A traditional, canoe shaped fishing boat which may be a dugout boat made from a single tree trunk. Larger pirogues can take more than 20 people.

of the local routes and ways of accessing communication technologies that are needed to navigate official controls in multiple countries.

In the Casamance, Muslim religious teachers or leaders known as Marabouts⁵ play a very important role in shaping the migration decision in a context of extremely high-risk migration where the dangers are well known. We therefore realised that there were other aspects of facilitation that needed to be considered. The first was mystico-religious influences on migrants' imaginaries and how they understood and analysed risk, their own fate, luck and actions within that. Secondly we sought to understand the role of cultural norms in shaping migrants' decisions. In particular gender norms related to transitions to adulthood for men and becoming a good provider for the family were considered and how women did or did not participate in the migration process. Both of these broad areas of inquiry also have vast literatures so we refer to only a few key studies here.

The role of religion in migration has been examined from a variety of perspectives: as a focal point for diaspora communities to group around and acquire a sense of belonging in alien societies; providing assistance to irregular migrants en route where spaces for official assistance have shrunk due to migration policies; as a belief system to interpret and give meaning to risk, and as a source of solace and emotional support for migrants and their families embarking on journeys that can lead to death and suffering (Eppsteiner and Hagan, 2016 ; Nyamnjoh, 2016 ; Carretero and Carling, 2012). It is the latter two areas of scholarship that are most relevant to the analysis here.

An analysis of religious beliefs in migration decision making and the migration process can also show the agency that is involved in migration and situate it in everyday religious practices in particular social contexts. Hagan (2008) studied the religious practices of Central American migrants during the hazardous 2000-mile journey to the USA. She found that migrants relied on religion to cope with trauma, find meaning, and create order in times of crisis. Mazzucato's (2005) research in Ghana and the Netherlands found that Christian pastors are believed to possess powers to resolve document problems that migrants would encounter along the way or at destination. In her study, migrants carried spiritual symbols for their protection, such as holy images and engraved medallions which are similar to the artefacts given by the Marabout to Senegalese migrants for their protection. Sara Hamood's (2006) research on migration from West Africa through Libya to Europe is very relevant for our analysis. She analysed the coping practices of migrants travelling on dangerous, overcrowded, poor quality boats. These migrants relied on their faith to help them cope with the perils of crossing and to prepare for possible death. Gaibazzi (2015) examines the intermingling of economic concerns with religious and moral discourses related to the timing of migration and the risk of being tempted into immoral behaviour. Gambian society, where Gaibazzi's research was located, is similar to Senegalese

⁵ A Muslim religious teacher in West Africa who is a scholar of the Qur'an, devoting himself to prayer and study. In Senegal and Mali, Marabouts depend on donations for survival.

society; young men wait for an appropriate time to depart based on “God’s will”. Ndiaye (2013) conceptualises mysticism as a "practice-truth-belief" system, where societies resort to the mystic to solve vital concerns for which reason cannot provide satisfactory explanations.

In this paper, we examine the role of the Marabout and how they shape migration decisions and experiences. Bava’s research (2014) shows how maraboutism and other traditional rituals are summoned by migrants in the migratory act with the aim of thwarting all the traps contained in migration. Nyamnjuh’s (2016) research on Marabout networks is also a good starting point as it shows how they have risen in Senegalese society to occupy critical positions in various illicit businesses.

While migration from Senegal continues to be male-dominated, the role of women in such a context has been discussed only in a handful of studies. Women also aspire to migrate, but their methods of navigating migration controls may be completely different. An ethnographic study of aspiring female migrants in Senegal shows that they try to meet European men online to form relationships that can facilitate their migration (Venables, 2008). Our research reveals other kinds of strategies which we discuss further down in the paper. In terms of women’s involvement in the migration of men, Melly (2011) observes that in contrast to the male members of the family who embarked on dangerous journeys, women played a supporting role as they mourned, worried, pleaded and waited (p. 363). Our research shows that women play an important role in the facilitation of men’s migration and brings the details of this hitherto under-researched phenomenon to light.

Other aspects of migration and gender have been researched included the economic activities of female migrants as discussed by Ebin’s (1995) research on Senegalese women opening hair salons in New York; Evers Rosanders (2005 and 2010) on Senegalese women traders in Spain; Sarr (1998) on women entrepreneurs travelling internationally as well as Toma’s (2014) research on the dependency and independence of female migrants. Sorana Toma observed that the economic contribution of a married woman to the family does not challenge the role of the man as the only person responsible for the economic survival of the household. Other studies such as Diallo’s (2009) on *driankés* in Dakar shows how Senegalese international women traders have gained fame in South-East Asia and Dubai. These women were educated and capitalised on their matrimonial and socio-professional advantages to finance trips and bring goods to Dakar. In our research, there were women engaged in clandestine migration but the circumstances in which they migrated and the transactions that they engaged in, suggest that their choices are very limited.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted in four regions: the Kolda region (Medina Yoro Foulla, Vélingara, Kolda departments). The Sédhiou region (Goudomp department, Tanaf locality). The Ziguinchor region (Oussouye department, Elinkine locality). Although not part of Casamance, the survey was

also conducted in Tambacounda city as many brokers are located there. Interviews were conducted with aspiring (18), returned and deported migrants (26), the families of migrants (12), six smugglers and four civil society organisations. Our approach was mainly qualitative, involving in-depth interviews and life histories to gain insights into the inner logic of the migration industry and how smuggling was operationalised. All the interviewees were male. Although the plan was to interview equal numbers of men and women, the research team did not succeed in speaking to any female migrants and all male interviewees denied the existence of female migrants at all. Later in the paper we discuss the reasons for the stigmatisation and invisibilization of female migrants. Initial attempts to identify migrants involved in clandestine migration were met with very vague responses. At most, we received responses such as 'yes we have migrants in our village' or, 'the father is absent, come back again', most likely because of a climate of suspicion and fear that had been created by awareness campaigns among the communities about the dangers of irregular migration. These campaigns had created a kind of stigma, where clandestine migrants, smugglers and other agents were regarded as "delinquents" at best or criminals at worst. As a result, it was necessary to gain the trust of the communities in this particular project even though the team had been working in the area for a number of years. Three highlights summarize our approach. This first moment of contact entailed informal and intense discussions with possible respondents that we had pre-identified based on the objectives of the study. This was when consent or refusal was recorded or any requests for clarification addressed. The research team made it clear that the work is strictly related to academic research and the knowledge created would not be used in ways that could result in anyone being identified and punished. It should be noted here that being accompanied by local students facilitated the building of trust. Also, in some of the villages, other development projects paved the way for the research team by introducing them to the communities. The second step was to establish rapport with the families of migrants to understand their views on migration, their strategies to enable or prevent it and their relations with different intermediaries. Initially we faced criticism due to the frustration of families towards the government's failure to create employment for young people at a time when agricultural production was declining. But after detailed explanations of our purpose, there was a level of rapport which was conducive to starting the research. The third step was identifying the different actors who are involved in the process of migration of an individual before and during the journey. The interviews focused on five categories of actors to understand their interests, social obligations and power relations as well as the material assets that they brought to bear on the migration process.

Aspiring migrants

These were individuals actively preparing to migrate. The questions for this category focused on the migration project and the practical investments being made to bring about migration. We were also interested in pre-migration administrative procedures that the migrant had to complete, how they view migration and the risks and rewards as well the response of the family and community to their migration. Additionally, we posed questions on how these responses and

attitudes differed for men and women. From informal discussions the research team had concluded that female migration remains strongly stigmatized. It was therefore interesting to examine whether and how women were migrating and how their use of intermediaries and smugglers differed. Although we aimed to interview 30 aspiring migrants, we were able to interview only 18 among whom only two were women. The stigmatisation of female migrants meant that they were either reluctant to participate themselves or were prevented by their men folk. However, interviews with the families of migrants and other stakeholders provided information about autonomous female emigration and revealed different attitudes to their migration.

Returnees

These included migrants who had been deported from a transit or destination country as well as those who had returned voluntarily. Although the experiences of the two would be different both were grouped together as it was sometimes difficult to get them to reveal if their return was voluntary or not. There is a sense of shame associated with failed migrations leading to the reluctance to divulge these reasons. This category was interviewed as a life history. Efforts were made to understand the economic and social position of the migrant prior to the trip as well as during the trip in transit areas. We were also attentive to interrupted journeys, migrants' coping strategies and the role of intermediaries in these locations.

Families of migrants

These were families of the migrants interviewed. We felt it would be essential to speak to the heads of the households and carers of the migrant, usually the parents, to gain their perspective. We expected, in line with migration theories of the role of the family in migration decision-making, to find that the decision was taken as a family where the family invests in the migration of an individual in anticipation of returns and the migrants also undertakes the migration in order to secure their inheritance, set aside money for their own futures and improve the standard of the family. The interview guide explores the social and economic transformational importance of migration in the family and community. Careful observation was made of the livelihood activities, patterns of production and distribution of resources, the living conditions, relations with political and social authorities in the community and the family's long-term goals. For this category, 14 households were interviewed instead of 10 initially planned as it was relatively easy to find respondents.

Smugglers and intermediaries

Interviewing smugglers and migration intermediaries proved challenging because there was secrecy and a reluctance to discuss a clandestine business and also because many of the key figures were located in Tambacounda town which was some distance away from the original sites planned. The criminalization of smuggling activity meant that smugglers were very suspicious of our motives and how the information would be used. Consequently, the first six months were spent cultivating relationships that would open up conversations with the smugglers and

intermediaries. They were identified through snowballing and with each new contact the approach was slow; we had to wait an average of ten days after the first contact with a smuggler to be granted an appointment. Two of the smugglers voluntarily agreed to open-ended discussions with the research team but refused to sign a consent form. The questions focused on the activity itself, its structuring and logic and financial flows. Our focus was on understanding how relationships are established and the nature of the relationship between migrants and various intermediaries. We wanted to know their *modus operandi* in as much detail as possible. After much effort six smugglers were interviewed instead of the 10 originally planned.

NGOs and other formal administrative structures

Additionally, four NGOs working on migration management and migrant rights were interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was to understand their modes of financing, goals and the relationship with migrants and their families. Our original plan was to interview ten but since the larger NGOs are based in Dakar, we were able to interview only four. Most of our letters and emails to organizations in Dakar were not answered.

Focus group discussions were held with returned migrants to gain different perspectives on motivations by stimulating debate on the travel conditions and relationships with smugglers and / or intermediaries. We also utilized radio recordings broadcast by community radio and national radio stations in Kolda to understand how migration was being represented to aspiring migrants and the community. Many radio stations in the Kolda region air programmes to raise awareness about illegal migration and the dangers of the road.

4. The context

Due to its geographical position, Senegal has a long history of migration. Indeed, located in the extreme west of the African continent, this country of the Sahel has common borders with Mauritania in the north, Mali in the east, Guinea Conakry and Guinea-Bissau in the south. Gambia is an enclave that divides Senegal in two and penetrates more than 300 km inside the country. This geographic position makes Senegal a hub that receives migrants from the sub-region while allowing them to migrate to the international destinations. In particular, the Casamance region is an important migration hub in the country receiving migrants in transit and also a point of origin for Senegalese travelling abroad⁶.

Casamance is made up of the administrative regions of Ziguinchor, Sedhiou and Kolda. These three regions are all located in the southern part of Senegal and have the characteristic of being separated from the rest of Senegal by the Republic of Gambia in the north and by Guinea Conakry and Guinea-Bissau in the South. Casamance has enormous economic potentialities but has

⁶ It should be emphasized, however, that not all those who leave are necessarily from the Kolda region, as there are transit migrants from Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau and nationals of Gambia, attracted by the geopolitical situation of the Kolda region. Generally, people in transit settle for a longer or shorter period in order to better prepare for their migration journeys. Such people present themselves as a native of Kolda in surveys.

remained very poor. This is due to the security crisis and the deterioration of climatic conditions that have combined to profoundly affect the two pillars of the economy of the region namely tourism and agriculture. The Casamance is affected by a three-decade old insurgency by the Democratic Movement of the Forces of Casamance (MFDC) which opposes the State of Senegal. This conflict is very accentuated in the west and central parts of the country is the oldest conflict of the sub-region of West Africa. It has resulted in the abandonment of villages, the displacement of populations and the presence of mines in fields and orchards which impact on agriculture.

Called the Fuladou countries, the administrative region of Kolda is composed mostly of Fulani while the administrative Sédhiou unit is populated mainly by *Mandingo* and *Balanta*. The *diola* majority is in the administrative entity of Ziguinchor in the west. *Manjaags*, *Wolof*, *jakhanke people* and *Sarakolés* or *Soninke* are also found in Casamance. The crossroads position of Kolda makes it a melting pot of sub-regional trade with notably the international weekly market of Diaobé, the markets of Mandat Douane, Medina Gounass, Saré Yoba, Pata, Médina Yoro Foulah, and Fafacourou. These old trade connections are the foundations for modern migratory patterns that we see today.

In Kolda the majority of inhabitants are under 20 years of age and in some rural communities this segment of the population may represent over 60% of the population. Also, according to the Demographic and Continuous Health Survey (EDS-Continuous) (ANSD, 2017), four out of ten households (37%) reported collecting the Family Safety Grant, making Kolda record the highest percentage of households benefiting from the government's flagship programme. While this is a strong indicator of the level of household poverty, it may also be an indicator of migration arising as a result of access to these resources for families with few opportunities at home. The latest population and housing census show 7.6% of the departures in Senegal are from the Kolda region. Popular destinations are in Europe – Spain and France – but also within Africa including Gambia, Morocco and Sierra Leone. Due to the large numbers of people from Kolda in the various transit zones of Mali, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, IOM has set up an office in Kolda. The declared objective of this office is to help find practical solutions to migration “problems” and providing humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced persons. Also, the geographical proximity of the Kolda region to Guinea-Bissau and Guinea Conakry provides a vantage location for IOM to intervene often in villages near the border between these countries. At the same many local NGOs were able to obtain EU funding to implement the programmes to stop irregular migration. In the Casamance NGOs that were previously focused on agricultural development as their missions are investing in new programmes to fight irregular migration. This is indicative of the importance of the phenomenon of irregular migration in the area.

RESULTS

5. Factors shaping the migration decision

It is said that migration has been embedded in the culture of Senegal since colonial times when the leader of the Mourides, Cheikh Amadou Bamba was exiled (Nyamnjoh 2016, 196). Different explanations have been offered for the current patterns of high risk irregular migration from West Africa including economic hardship imposed by structural adjustment programmes (Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006), and ideas of masculinity, pride, honour and courage which 'intertwine in accounts of the decision to embark on a pirogue to Europe' (Carretero-Hernández and Carling 2012, 411). Others such as De Boeck and Honwana (2005) have linked the migration decisions of African youth to their aspirations for a different way of living and wealth.

Irregular migration has become the norm in the Casamance due to the difficulties of obtaining visas to Europe. Mamoudou is a 24-year-old aspiring migrant with a brother in Belgium was hoping to migrate legally, but he eventually gave up after not getting a visa. *'Because I tried the other way and it didn't work and here in Senegal when you want to take the legal route you get tired of it. Maybe by road it will work, and my only dream is to go outside.'*

Many of the men that we interviewed said that they were planning to migrate to improve the situation of the family. In Senegal sons are socialized to undertake supreme sacrifices for the well-being of their parents. They seek by all means to raise their families to an honourable rank. Lamine's account reveals the complexity of the migration decision

'My problem is that I can't find a good job that allows me to take care of my family - otherwise I would never go to Libya. Because I know the difficulties I encountered once I left. And I have to succeed so that I can help my brother to take care of the family. But also, my neighbour who went to Italy and today his family is living well, he has built a big building in his house. He has bought agricultural equipment for his family and now his younger brothers are living well; their rice, millet and peanut crops alone provide for some of the family's basic needs. So, it was a great inspiration for me. Today he comes back to Senegal every year, so I talk a lot with him, and it gave me an idea of the road and that's how I decided to leave in my turn in the hope of changing things.'

However, wrapped up with these explanations were also aspirations for modern lifestyles. Take the case of Baba, a 24-year-old belonging to a large family of farmers and breeders with 25 members including the parents, siblings and their spouses. In this part of Senegal, youth marry young, usually around the age of 19, and the daughters-in-law live in the large extended family and help with the family farm. Baba was unable to complete primary school because his parents could not afford his school fees. However, he had completed advanced Qoranic studies like most of his age group in the villages around Saré Woudou. He did not have the chance to practice a trade despite the fact that he wanted to be a carpenter. He wanted to migrate to change his own prospects and the living standards of his family. His friends' successful migration was his motivation as they had very quickly changed the 'life conditions of their families' soon after their

arrival in Europe. He persuaded his father to sell a few cows to pay for the journey. During discussions with key informants, the lack of prospects for employment after school was identified as a reason for migration among the youth of Kolda. They drop out of school to pursue a migration career as this is perceived to be more promising for earning well and transforming their and their families' lives.

In terms of proximate economic factors that appear to precipitate the migration decision in Kolda, poverty, uncertainties of a better future and demographic pressures play a role. In the past migration occurred under the *Rouwmougol* system of seasonal migration practiced by the Peulhs. This practice dates back to the colonial period and consists of being recruited as a seasonal worker in the groundnut basin of Senegal. The Fulani people of Kolda used it for a long time as an additional source of income. However, groundnut production has suffered in recent years. According to the President of FODDE, a local NGO which has been working in the Kolda region for almost 30 years in the department of Medina Yoro Foula, the influx of people from the north looking for agricultural land increased the pressure on land in the Casamance. The arrival of people from the north was encouraged as groundnut and cotton were intended for export.

This is really the paradox of migration. Because in the 1970s, Medina Yoro Foula received a large population from central Senegal in search of fertile land because the peanut basin suffered a huge degradation of the soil. This is why people migrated heavily to Medina Yoro Foula. At the same time, the populations of Medina Yoro Foula were leaving for Europe in search of better living conditions because for this population, it was impossible to get out of poverty through agriculture while that for the northern populations, the Medina Yoro Foula MYF lands were all that they wanted. So, you see the paradox, some said that here is the El Dorado and the indigenous people were fleeing poverty. So, they were going to get the fortune elsewhere.

A majority of families in Kolda have a piece of land to cultivate for the subsistence needs of the family. When there is a surplus, it is sold at weekly markets called *Loumas*. The proceeds from the sale of the surplus are used, among other things, to support the children's school fees, the purchase of medical prescriptions or sometimes to cover the expenses related to maternity in the hospitals, the purchase of food and the organization of certain family or religious events. Despite the state subsidy of agricultural inputs, part of the money from the sale of agricultural products is reinvested in agriculture.

Families with migrants are better off and in fact poverty is all the more severe when the family is large and without migrants (families with more than 30 people have been observed). When the family has migrants, remittances make it possible to smooth incomes and raise the standard of living. Smaller families with up to ten migrants (one or more migrants) appear to have a better standard of living. These families eat three daily meals, the children are schooled and continue in education, the house is equipped with solar panels, concrete buildings and durable goods.

Other, less known reasons for embarking on high-risk irregular migration emerged from our research. Some aspiring migrants and their parents spoke of embarking on migration to save face in the community and become respectable after having engaged in illicit activities locally. Ironically engaging in illegal migration did not seem to affect the ability of migration to redeem one's social standing. As one aspiring migrant noted this transformation:

Already, as soon as they leave and a few years later, you hear that the one who left rebuilt his mother's house, did that, and all that. Also, they have a lot of social considerations. I know one of them, he did a lot of stupid things here before he left for Italy. People only said bad things about him, besides, nobody wanted his child to go with him. When he came back the first time, the way people looked at him changed. Everyone changed the way they looked at him. He could even go home and see the daughters of notables. At the mosque, at the end of the Friday prayers, he would give money to the needy and also to the old people in the mosque. We even prayed a lot for him.

6. The predicament of migrating women

Analysis of the interview transcripts (migrants, migrant families) as well as radio programmes being broadcast in the area shows that most of the female irregular migrants with aspirations to reach Europe are single or divorced and often living with foster families. Women in such circumstances may view migration as a route to emancipation from the weight of tradition and family. They mobilize social contacts who can help them with their project, but this involves careful and clandestine negotiations due to the restrictions placed on them under patriarchal norms. When a woman commits herself to migration, she has little support in the community and must do everything herself to arrange the journey as was the case of a 35-year-old hairdresser who, under the insistence of a friend migrated to Portugal. Women like her usually keep their migration plans secret because of the stigmatisation of women travelling abroad on their own, without a male protector. The predicament of female migrants is that they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse because they lack support from their relatives and the community. As we describe later in the paper, they are often forced to resort to transactional sexual relations with smugglers and this reinforces the common perception of their immorality and social exclusion.

In popular social representations female migrants are portrayed as prostitutes and international migration as “the gateway to debauchery”. For example, a Senegalese migrant living in Libya told a radio programme that ‘if a woman attempts illegal migration, she is forced to prostitute herself under the protection of a pimp in order to facilitate her passage from one site to another until she reaches her destination.....’. Most of the returnees that we interviewed were against women migrating through irregular channels, such as 26 years old Oumar, who was deported from Libya ‘A woman! If it's up to me, I won't accept it. Because the suffering that a man can endure, a woman will not. If a sister of mine would like to leave the country, I would not agree with her and

even if I have money, I will not give it to her. I will not incur any debt and will not be a guarantor of her attempts, because they are not enduring.’ Abdoulaye Diallo, a returned migrant similarly says about female migration: ‘My daughters are not going to leave. Others can take that path, but my daughters are not going to travel....’. Arfang who had been through the Sahara once before to Libya said,

I saw a woman; she divorced to migrate and was told that this kind of trip is too risky for a woman because it is Libya and it is not Europe where you can easily get money. It's Libya where it's a mess. Over there, an African woman doesn't dare go out to look for work. As a result, all they do is sell themselves, all the women who come this way just give themselves to men to get money and continue on their way - they don't work with dignity to get money, but that's what they give themselves to men and that's not good. It's better to stay in Senegal and do good than to sell yourself to men.

Married women are keen to demonstrate that they do not engage in such activities in order to uphold their reputation and honour. Hawlatou, a 25-year-old married woman without children, speaks about women migrating on their own ‘*There are women who are here, and their husbands are outside, and they do not like this situation. And sometimes she anticipates it by saying that if you marry me, you'll take me with you. And there are others who really don't like it like me. It's not in my thoughts unless my husband commits to bring me. But if he doesn't tell me, I'd rather stay here and work..... It's very rare here. A girl who migrates illegally is very rare.*’

The materials collected during the fieldwork suggest that international female migration begins with internal migration where they first move to urban centres such as Ziguinchor, Kolda, and Dakar or across the border to Guinea-Bissau and then attempt a long-distance international journey. Women are often recruited as domestic workers at each stage of the transit, either in houses or in local restaurants. The interviews suggest that there is a new phenomenon of women migrating to the seaside resorts of Cap-Skirting, Kafountine and Abéné in Senegal, where they work as domestic workers for Europeans, or as managers or waitresses in bars. Generally, they do this work in the hope of meeting a white lover who can make it easier for them to travel to Europe or, in any case, take care of them economically. Thus our research corroborates Veneble’s (2008) finding that relations with European men are an important means for women to exit Senegalese society.

7. God’s will in a context of high-risk migration

The interviews with men at origin show that the decision to migrate was taken notwithstanding the high risks that are well known. The specific dangers and the points at the which they occur are discussed all the time in day-to-day conversations in Kolda villages. Aspiring migrants and their families have up to date, often real time information, through their friends and relatives who send them updates on WhatsApp, Facebook, Imo and photo sending from various transit points along the way.

Religious tenets were repeatedly invoked during the interviews and attention to them has allowed us to gain insights into how migrants interpret life events and migration risks. They draw on religious beliefs to situate the migration decision in their cultural meaning system. They also turn to the teachings of God to be able to cope with extremely harsh conditions on the way and dealing with failed migrations.

Our interviews with aspiring and return migrants indicate that the way they conduct their lives is rooted in a sense of Islamic morality and identity. Islamic ideals of being good men to their families and to Allah for the day of reckoning were mentioned frequently in conversations. Their migration imaginaries are developed with these social and religious points of reference and this gives them a way of finding meaning in the decision to migrate despite known risks. When considering the likelihood of death at sea or in the desert during the preparatory stage before departing, such understandings of life, death and fate as well as being a “good” Muslim give them the emotional and psychological means to prepare for bad outcomes. The need for blessings from one’s parents was upheld as extremely important and those who left without the support of their parents blame that omission for their failed migrations.

Although migrants are fatalistic, their actions are also full of hope and agency as they try to make the best of their lives within God’s plan. Marabout play a critical role in both delivering God’s message to migrants and their families and also engaging in prayers to higher cosmic forces to protect the migrant and shape their destiny.

For Arfang a 38-year-old mechanic in Kolda, the success of his friends compared to his own life was due to God’s design and this was why he was considering migration.

It is God who wanted things to happen like this, if not me I never wanted a friend to go ahead of me in life, because one, I am proud of myself and two, I don't want to be dependent on anyone. I have always dreamed of having a lot of money to help people and at the moment I have a piece of land that I want to build but I don't have the means to do so, while my friends have passed this stage, so I too have decided to take this path.’ He was aware of the risks and was prepared to accept whatever God had in store for him as his fate. ‘This kind of journey is always difficult, and it is not easy to say that I will succeed, but since we are believers, I believe that I will succeed insha-Allah, but I may not succeed too and even die there it is possible. It's the journey, but God is great, I'll make it Insha-Allah.

Alpha’s interview also shows that he was well aware of the risks of migration but felt that success or failure in the migration project depended on God’s will.

I can say that dangers are numerous in illegal migration. At the borders, migrants are treated like animals by policemen because they asked us for money, and what is bad is

that even if migrants give them money, they start to beat them. Besides in the ghettos⁷, the brokers also take any opportunity to take money off migrants. And also, when they're on board, migrants are in a dilemma because they can be abandoned by a driver in the middle of the Sahara and they die of thirst and hunger. They can also be imprisoned in some countries. Therefore, illegal migration is a very dangerous phenomenon. It's only with God's help that you can succeed in migration.

Migrants may either seek the blessings of Marabout to bless their journeys or derive confidence in the chances of succeeding in their migration from their faith in God. Karfa, a 41-year-old aspiring migrant in Doumassou who was working as a mason locally at the time of the interview expresses his confidence in the success of his migration project because of his faith in God.

I'm almost 42 and I do masonry. I want to migrate, and I've thought about it and now I've made the decision... I am very confident because I trust in God and I have the trust and blessing of my parents. The blessing of the parents is very important, that's why I know I will succeed. I am certain that the day I leave, I will reach my destination. Here it is a matter of self-confidence and knowing what you want to leave for and especially what you have left behind. If you know what you have left behind, you have a thousand chances to succeed.

Another migrant Mamoudou believes that only God can know what is in fate for him and he derives optimism from this feeling.

It's a journey that only God knows, but I think it won't be too difficult, I'm optimistic. I don't know why, but I'm optimistic. I'm sure that the day I put on my shoes and leave the house, I'm going to arrive, whatever the difficulties.

While God's will was given importance, the blessings of parents were also mentioned. Aspiring migrant Harouna also thinks that his faith and blessings from his parents will see him through the journey safely

I am very confident because I have the trust in God, and I have the blessing of my parents. The blessing of my parents is very important, that's why I know I will succeed. I am sure that the day I leave, I will reach my destination. Here it is a matter of self-confidence and knowing what you want to leave for and especially what you have left behind. If you know what you have left behind, you have a thousand chances to succeed.

Seventeen-year-old Djiby also talks about the risks of irregular migration in great detail but makes light of them by referring to them as rumours. He too feels that the outcome depends on God's will and whatever that is must be accepted.

⁷ The functioning of ghettos is discussed in detail later in the paper.

According to the rumours I hear on this trip the probability that people will not reach the desired destination is very high because there are aggressors, one can get lost in the dessert or in the sea for days, that is what the repatriated migrant told me because he got lost for three days in the dessert and he also told me that when he got lost in the sea....Of course nothing can dissuade me from leaving! I have to leave in order to have a lot of money and to support my family, my parents in particular, and to build my house like my comrades who went away. If this (anything going wrong) is what God decides I would accept it. But at the moment I only think of going to Italy or Spain.

On the other hand, 45-year-old Diawoula took the decision to migrate to seek God's forgiveness for sins he had committed in Senegal. He interprets the events that led to his migration as God rescuing him from a life of crime and guiding him to seek redemption overseas

I was with Niantang (a rebel leader of the MFDC). We used to poach on the roads. We smuggled cashew nuts and took money from travellers by force. We had an entire night of face-to-face encounters with the Senegalese army. It is thanks to God that I got out and we withdrew to the border to Diattacounda. I lied to my family to tell them that I had found work at Cap-Skiring. I fed my family during this time with the blood and tears of others that I shed. I still look back east to ask God's forgiveness for the crimes I have committed. What I'm telling you now, no one in the family knows. I'm a man from hell. With all the sins I've committed, to be forgiven by God, I have to leave this country. God has said it, repent sincerely and leave the land where you have done wrong and start a new life (he starts reciting litanies from the Koran).

As mentioned previously, parents may also support the migration of a son to help them to escape from dishonourable ways of making a living locally. This was the case of this Imam from the village of Pata, who feared that his 24-year-old son would engage in illegal timber trafficking⁸ or smuggling of goods between the Gambia and Senegal and be imprisoned. That would have been a disgrace in relation to his social standing. To avoid any such occurrences the Imam supported his irregular migration.

Either he migrated, or he would have got into complicated situations like for example selling (wood) and trafficking between Senegal and Gambia. Imagine the shame I would have felt towards my relatives if he had felt into delinquency. He had to go.

However not all families share the same approach to risk-taking because of the number of reported deaths at sea and the extreme suffering of migrants on the road. A few migrants had left without the knowledge or permission of their families because they did not want to be prevented. This individualistic migration without the agreement of parents constitutes a rupture

⁸ Timber smuggling has become a serious problem in the Casamance between Gambia and Guinea, where trees are being felled illegally and smuggled across to Gambia for export to China https://www.sciencesetavenir.fr/nature-environnement/trafic-de-bois-au-senegal-la-casamance-menacee-de-deforestation-d-ici-deux-ans_18344

of the migratory pattern hitherto observed in the studies of Sahelian migration. Hassane, a deported 35-year-old migrant says:

My father did not agree that I leave because my brothers were still too young. For my part, I told myself that this was the only solution available to me so no question of giving up. I did not even see the marabouts for a mystical preparation as I was overwhelmed by the desire to leave

The families of migrants who departed in this way may make great efforts to track them down and force their return. Take the case of a 33-year-old, who had embarked on irregular migration by road. After arriving in Algeria, he managed to find a job through a Senegalese he met in Algiers. However, following investigations, his family was able to find him, and his father and wife forced him to return. A similar story was told by another migrant who sold his bulls 450,000 FCFA and left without telling his family. Once in Morocco, friends from the same village sent information of his whereabouts back.

Religion also plays an important role in providing succour at destination for migrants who are trying to adjust to an alien society and missing their loved ones. Samba describes how she comforted herself in Libya by praying

You yourself know it's not easy to leave a family behind. When I think about my family, sometimes I feel like giving up everything and going back to Senegal when I was in Libya as I feel this feeling now as well because I'm far away from my children in Libya. But often I pray to God who always gives me the strength to resist all these sufferings.

8. Preparing for the journey

Returning migrants and deportees are a critical source of information for those who are preparing for the journey. They offer advice on where to cross the border, which modes of transport to use, how to prepare for the journey, what to carry on one's person and how to avoid being robbed and exploited on the way and where to stay en route. As these actors usually do not expect financial remuneration, we are calling them altruistic actors here, unlike others who are in the business of migration facilitation to make monetary profits. But the migrant may run up 'cultural debts' to these altruistic actors in social systems of reciprocity to repay them at an unspecified point in the future. Takoulaye, a 17-year-old aspiring male migrant describes how he consulted a returnee and why he values his counsel.

He is someone who is older than me. He gave me advice and asked me to be on my guard against criminals. Migrants think they are smugglers but what interests them (the criminals) is to rob you and scam you to get your money. He took this route and he arrived safe and sound, that's why I trust him to guide me.

.... ..Every time when talking on the phone, I ask him questions about the trip. Sometimes when I talk to him on the phone, I remind him of the itinerary. There he tells me yes it's

good. Sometimes he adds the name of a person on the way. I stay focused on the journey we have defined together.

As much as potential male migrants can benefit from such advice, it seems difficult for women to benefit in this way because of the combination of several factors such as the social representations that very hastily correlate the migration of single women and prostitution, the views expressed about female migrants by returning migrants and their social stigmatisation and radio programmes which highlight their extreme vulnerability to sexual abuse.

Radio programmes warning aspiring migrants of the risks of migration are now commonplace in Kolda. But rather than dissuading them as the government and programme funders hope, these have become a source of vital information for preparing for the trip. One aspiring migrant from the village of Ndorna, instead of worrying about getting a passport and applying for a visa, listens to the radio every night. He tunes into the programme about migration to listen to the testimonies of migrants deported from the road. He carefully notes the journeys, the names of the ghettos (places of temporary residence for migrants waiting for a hypothetical crossing). He, and so many other aspiring migrants that we encountered engage in this practice. Sometimes, this information is taken by the family, all gathered around the radio to try to decode this or that other return migrant testimony. Involved in the journey of his son, this father of a family of seventeen, who after two years of efforts to raise money for the trip has embarked on an active search for information and radio testimonies helped him to find some useful information. To the question about the usefulness of radio programs to raise awareness against illegal migration, he answered:

Yes, at first it was useful for myself because when he first discussed his project to migrate, I also started to listen to the programmes on migration on the community radio. One day, there was a migrant who was brought back because he was in prison in Libya. That day, after the broadcast, I realized that on the road there are intermediaries, drivers, policemen, crossing points ...

Unsurprisingly there are a number of actors in close proximity of the migrants' social circle who position themselves to make a profit from the migration. Foremost amongst these are the Marabouts (Islamic spiritual leaders)⁹ who are extremely important throughout the migration journey and even after return.

Marabouts

The central importance of Marabouts in blessing migrants and offering them protection against risks and failure has been noted before (Nyamnjoh 2016) but here, we provide more detail on their role and relations with the migrant as well as their family. In Kolda it is believed that Marabout have spiritual powers that allow them to foresee the future and ward off obstacles. The journey is usually not undertaken without the blessing of a Marabout although those

⁹ In the strictly Islamic sense, a Marabout is a religious leader, teacher or guide. However the term is used more broadly now to include a variety of self-appointed soothsayers, fetishists and healers.

migrating without the knowledge of their families reported that they did not always go to Marabouts. If the Marabout says the travel should not be undertaken then the migrant must obey. On the other hand, if he feels that there are obstacles that can be cleared away through rituals or sacrifices the migrant or their family are asked to arrange them. These include asking for offerings: a rooster or a goat which is killed to prepare a meal for the community in order to earn good fortune through good deeds. Marabout may write verses from the Holy Qur'an and attach them around the neck, waist, arms, etc. placed inside gris-gris. Sometimes the scriptures are macerated in water (*Safara*) and the recipient has to sprinkle the water on themselves or drink it every day. Through various rituals Marabout seek to “force fate”, to ward off bad luck or to attract luck and success. Forcing fate also means seeking protection against theft, scams and all the other hazards along the way. For migrants these rituals and amulets can be a source of comfort in a journey where they have few other sources of emotional or spiritual support. The highest form of protection that the Marabout offers is a “Bain Mystique” or mystical bath and they will pray for the migrant all night.

Boubacar, a 17-year-old aspiring migrant from the Vélingara department thinks his migration will succeed because he consulted a Marabout:

I think I have a good chance of succeeding because I went to see two Marabouts. They both told me the same thing about this trip; that I will succeed if I am patient during the trip. They have asked me to make sacrifices (three red colas plus two white chickens that I will give to two strangers) and I must give water as a sacrifice on the day of my departure. So, all that remains for the success of my journey depends on divine strength.

Similar views were expressed by 34-year-old Moussa who was deported from Libya but who is planning to travel again

I prepared my first trip for a year before leaving and it cost me a total of 30 000 FCFA. But I never went to see fetishes because it is forbidden by the Muslim religion. On the other hand, I went to see Marabouts, I gave at the beginning 200, 300 or even 500 FCFA because everything depends on the Marabout. I was given bottles filled with potions; it was often intended to be used as a bath. Sometimes the Marabouts would recommend me to give cola as charity, candles, 5f coins which were difficult even to find.

When preparing for the journey, migrants will consider both the practical challenges of the journey and the skill of smugglers to circumnavigate official restrictions and also what Allah has ordained for them, as communicated by the Marabout. Youssoupha, a 30-year-old who was working as a plumber in Kolda and hoping to migrate with the proceeds from the sale of his father's land said,

I often go to the Marabouts. They often tell me that I will travel and I will succeed if God wills it, but also I intend to leave with a lot of money and also I have made a lot of inquiries about the road; if however the person does not do all this he risks not reaching his desired

destination. But these are people who have learned the Qoran and they work on the basis of that. You know I'm not the one who told them I'm going to travel. They're the ones who knew that, but how? I don't know how. But one thing's for sure, it's God who comes down and tells them that this boy is going to travel, so I trust them.

Islamic Marabouts regard extreme-risk journeys as non-Islamic (Nyamnjoh 2016, 197), but other soothsayers may tell aspiring migrants that death at sea should be seen as martyrdom and an act of bravery. This explains one of the well-known mottos of migrants embarking on high risk migration 'Baca ou Bazrak' or 'Barcelona or death!' (Thomson 2014, Nyamnjoh 2016; Ba 2007).

Gendered infrastructures of migration

Women play a key role in the search for a good Marabout with a reputation for religious merit and the search is usually undertaken by the mother, the fiancée or the sisters of the potential migrant. One migrant, B Balde, said *'My mother had decided to support me mystically, and my brothers and sisters too had participated in the financing by visiting marabouts and making sacrifices.'* Another case was Hawa, who was married for just two months before her husband left. She now divides her time between domestic work and marabout consultations for the success of her husband's trip. She and her mother-in-law are constantly consulting Marabouts. As soon as they are informed about a seer or a Marabout, they go there. For Hawa, if her husband's migration fails, she will bear part of this failure herself because it will be said around her that she brings bad luck and she brought it to her husband. This can have serious consequences for her future in the village. She risks being stigmatized for the failure of her husband's migration and is doing everything in her capacity to bring blessings to him. While searching for a Marabout, the women refrain from saying openly *'I am looking for a clairvoyant or a fetishist for the emigration of my son'*. Indeed, as much as possible, the migratory project is kept secret so as not to bring bad omen, which could jeopardise the success of the migration.

Sometimes the search for a good fetishist or a good Marabout can lead to the most remote places, far from urban centres. As Aziz says finding a good Marabout is not easy *'Yes, but you know that now to find a good Marabout is not easy; they will only eat your money and I only have 300,000 FCFA and I don't know if that's enough for me. Maybe I'll see, but on this road only God can save the person.'*

This search can bring them into the sub-region (Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali border (Kedougou). In popular representation, it is generally accepted that "good seers and good fetishists" never leave their villages. The lead researcher had a chance meeting in a hotel in Kolda with the sister of a potential migrant who left the Louga region to meet a marabout who lives in Diambanouta, a remote village in the department of Vélingara. The trip took her just over eight hours of travel over a distance of about 580 kilometres.

The costs of consulting a Marabout ranged from 100,000 to 150,000 FCFA at the time of the fieldwork. Mothers are often responsible for funding these expenses through the sale of gold (Ba 2007). Sona, a housewife and the mother of a migrant, about 60 years old, says:

No dignified mother can let her child go under the conditions that are told on the radio without taking mother's precautions. That's right, only God kills, but a mother cannot stand still watching her child go to death without reacting.

Connections with illicit activities

Although performing religious and spiritual rituals, Marabout are locally known as “men of the shadows” because of their links with the world of illicit activities. They have become socially powerful since the ‘80s and ‘90s when their influence spread during the structural adjustment programmes and it was essential to have personal ties with influential people to get jobs. ‘Favours and corruption became omnipresent. Customs officials earned their money through smuggling goods and nepotism flourished, with ministers involving family members in construction projects, while trade union secretaries awarded their wives or friends catering contracts. A Marabout with a good network soon became a central figure in the Senegalese daily life of small and big favours.’ (Osmanovich, 2019, 230). The protection offered by Marabout is critical for illicit and criminal businesses (233). In Kolda, it is known that various migration intermediaries such as cokseurs and passeurs consult them to stay out of trouble. No doubt these connections are critical for placing migrants on certain trajectories within the irregular migration industry.

Marabouts support migrants throughout the journey and as a result, they have a steady income. Khalifa, a 52-year-old migrant from Sinthiou Sara in Kolda Department made two attempts at irregular migration by road and then by sea when he succeeded. A few years later, he took his son but by land. When asked about the nature of his communications with the Marabout, he replied:

In my case, the communication was about how to make sure I could obtain papers ... and now, since I received the papers, it is about how to pay for expenses, how to buy cows and how to build. And as far as my son is concerned, our communication often turns to money when he arrives in transit areas. But after his arrival in Italy, the communication has changed. Now we are talking about what we must do so that he can get papers.

Marabout are consulted by deported migrants after return to ask why their migration failed and the Marabout may claim that they were able to come home alive because of their protection, thereby maintaining their importance in the imaginations of the men. If the migration fails, migrants are more likely to blame fate, a lack of parents’ blessings or jealous relatives bringing them bad luck rather than barriers created by EU policies. One migrant who had left without his

parents' permission was found in Morocco with the help of his friends. He told the research team that his return was forced by the Marabout that his parents had consulted.

Financing migration

Enormous sacrifices can be made by parents to put their children on the path to migration, even if it is irregular as Ngom (2018) has also documented. The sale of animals is the most common way of funding migration indicating that it is not the poorest who are migrating. B Balde describes how his migration was financed: *'We had borrowed a cow from one of my father's friends; it's this cow and two of our own cows that we sold to make my trip possible. My brothers paid for another cow after the harvest (sic).'*

In our research migrants with siblings or relatives who had made it in Europe reported receiving large sums of money from them for their migration. This money would be sent to the migrant or to an intermediary at a transit point through money transfer agencies (described below).

Families may use other means at their disposal including illicit economic activities as the testimony of a farmer and cattle breeder shows. Y. Diao's family is composed of twenty people engaged in the sale of milk. Diao considers his, a poor family because there is not a single migrant in the family and therefore no remittances compared to other families in the village with migrants who have a better standard of living. The family decided to invest in the son's migration only after other options to make a living locally failed.

We have sacrificed other needs and other business to finance his migratory project. At the moment we were in very difficult life conditions ... First we increased the area of peanuts to be cultivated. We also sold a few head of cattle and we also trafficked wood by illegally cutting some trees in the forest. It's risky but we did that too. We sought help from every adult in the family and it was only after the sale of the crops that we put all the means together for the migration.

Money transfer agencies

Migrants leave with substantial sums of money on their person but they are often in need of further sums as they cross different transit points. It is now commonplace for money to be sent to them electronically through money transfer agencies such as Wari, Western Union, or Orange Money. These electronic systems of money transfer and connectors are critical for the survival and onward journeys of migrants. As Alpha said,

Each time I needed money, it was my father who sent it to me so I could carry on with my trip and have food. He sent my money via Western Union and the local people who work there allowed us to receive our money without much difficulty and then we gave them 10,000 or 15,000 FCFA.

Alternatively, a local "connector" can be found to give money to the migrant and then recover it from the migrants' family through their networks. Daouda, a 55-year-old farmer described how

his brother decided to set up an informal money transfer agency together with him. He collects money from families in the village and his brother, who is in Libya, pays there.

My brother has seen that it is quite difficult for migrants to receive and send money. Also, he saw that migrants suffer a lot on the road and these migrants once arrived in Libya, cannot receive their money through banks. This is because the Libyan government does not allow (irregular) migrants to receive and send money by bank and their earnings do not leave the country. To get and transfer money to Libya is only possible through "connections".

9. Cokseurs

The next actor that the migrant usually encounters is the cokseur or migrant recruiter. In southern Senegal, many cokseurs are based in Tambacounda. The last one to trade openly was charging each migrant 150,000 FCFA to arrange their passage to Libya. These actors then link up to other cokseurs and drivers to facilitate the clandestine journey of migrants to certain 'ghettos' at transit points in which they have an interest. All of this is done under the interested, benevolent watch of the police. Cokseurs wait at bus depots at various transit points picking out migrants with an eagle eye to recruit them for particular drivers.

In order to become a cokseur, one must possess the ability to entice migrants and "sell" the idea of migrating with their chosen driver. Establishing co-ethnic bonds is key to migrant recruitment and cokseurs often recruit migrants based on their language and ethnicity as they use this to establish rapport and trust. They use terms in the local dialect to greet them such as "Nagandef" in Wolof or "Diarama" in Puular. They employ mobile phones and digital technologies to entice the migrant to their transport operator who is linked to other actors further up the chain. This includes showing them photos on Facebook of Africans looking happy in Europe and messages on WhatsApp of migrants supposedly thanking the cokseur for a successful journey. These ploys are adopted to make the migrant believe that they have the connections to deliver the migrant safely to Italy or Spain. They may also take advantage of the migrant's anxiety and fear of refoulement to make the migrant believe that their help is invaluable.

The history of the cokseurs that we encountered were almost identical. Migrating initially, they found themselves stuck in transit areas. Unable to continue their journey and refusing to turn back, they invested in becoming a cokseur. Most of the cokseurs that we encountered or heard about were men. Kandé is a 35-year-old cokseur, who held various small jobs as a driver of Jakaarta vans, a motorcycle mechanic, and a driver's assistant at the local bus station. He is working to save so that he can travel irregularly to Europe with the immense hope that he will later return rich, with a lot of money. But, he says, unfortunately he was repatriated by IOM from Libya twice in a row. One of his compatriots living in Libya started him in the activity of becoming a cokseur.

I “became” a cokseur that is to say an intermediary because of a childhood friend who is in Libya. It is he who put me in this activity. I migrated twice but it was not my luck. The IOM returned me, and I suffered slavery after Gaddafi's death. So, when I came back, my friend who understood how to make money without getting tired guided me. He had a cargo of migrants who had to leave on a Saturday night in Tambacounda for Agadez, he asked me to coordinate the trip in all discretion with his travellers. I did it and they sent me the money before the day of departure, and he put me in touch with a bus driver with whom I negotiated the transport to Agadez. That's how I became cokseur.

Bacary is a 34-year-old living in Tambacounda town close to the border with Mali. He was earlier working as a carpenter but became a cokseur in 2012 when his elder brother decided to become a cokseur in Libya after failing to cross over to Europe. The elder brother brought his younger brother into the business to help him.

Most migrants, especially those at the border, in this case Libya and Morocco have become intermediaries after several attempts of dead ends, no hope and no money. Faced with this situation, they decide to stay to carry out this activity as they often receive calls from the countries of departure for information. This is the case of my big brother who is in Libya.

Payment arrangements for the cokseur vary; he may be paid by the passeur who sends him money to prepare the migrants' trip if the migrant's relatives have paid the passeur or he may be paid by the migrant at the first point of recruitment.

Disliked and not trusted

The figure of the cokseur is widely disliked as they are perceived to be exploitative and dishonest by migrants and at the same time necessary. Papo, a repatriated 19-year-old describes them in these terms:

They do not help any migrant, if the migrant has money they do business with him; if that is not the case they will not help you to come out of the situationThe behaviour is based on money, if the migrant has money to guide him he considers him as his own brother, he does everything for him and if he does not, he chases you away like wild beasts if you have no more money.

Another 48-year-old migrant returnee said: *‘The cokseurs greet us with joy because they knew that it is from us that they ensure their survival. But in reality, they do not like us, they are only interested in our money. But sometimes they help us to get information of transit areas.’*

Cokseurs are also known to stage fake kidnappings to extract ransom from the families of migrants. Barry, a migrant repatriated from Libya describes the process in these terms: *‘There are many individuals who play the role of cokseur. Some detain migrants as hostages and demand money from the parents of migrants. They are constituted in well-organized networks.’*

Secrecy for security

Many cokseurs had links to other cokseurs or passeurs (head smuggler) at different transit points. However not all have had a close working arrangement with a particular intermediary. Even if they put migrants in touch with drivers who would deliver them to ghettos from where passeurs took over, they did not necessarily communicate with each other or know each other. Indeed, many of them appreciated this fragmented and anonymous way of functioning because it offered them protection as anyone who was caught would not be able to divulge details of the entire chain of intermediaries. As one cokseur, named Massamba explained to us *'It is a network but its structuring is not legal, because in this network although we have a chief and small leaders, if I can say that, but what you have to understand is that it's based on secrets, and you do not need to know each other.'*

Fluid structure

While much of the policy discourse imagines a clear-cut binary between the migrant and smugglers, their roles seem to be rather more fluid on the ground with migrants taking part in the smuggling industry to earn and save for further travel. Aziz an 18-year-old migrant from Kolda describes how he became a cokseur for a short period of time at a transit point to make money,

It all started in Mali when I ran out of money and on the spot fortunately I met an old Sylla who gave me food and also some money so that I could continue on to Burkina. I slept at his place ... I had to work for him first by bringing him migrants who wanted to go to Niger or Tripoli. He would ask me to identify groups that spoke Wolof, Mandingo or Fulani and to report back to him afterwards. In any case, I had to identify those who come from Senegal. I helped him for 11 days. I worked near the market and the bus station. Sometimes I also went to the Niarella and Quinzamboubou neighbourhood to make a pickup. The old man gave me 20,000 FCFA for the 10 days and even offered me to continue working with him. But I wanted to continue. That's how I went to Burkina.

A variety of arrangements

The progression of the journey and the interaction between migrants and various intermediaries was not linear however and a variety of arrangements were seen. Nowadays with so much collective experience of migration in the community, there is little need to depend on intermediaries for knowledge of the route. This is somewhat different to the past pattern where a lump sum would be paid to a smuggler at origin and this person would link up with other cokseurs further along the chain. However, smugglers and other actors along the route are still essential for paying bribes and for staying up to date on where there are openings and gaps in the surveillance. Even those who remigrate will use smugglers but they engage in risk managing behaviour such as not agreeing to pay in advance and demanding to be put on a vehicle before handing over the money. Others contact higher level smugglers directly based on information given to them by returning migrants. This was seen especially in the case of migrants who were

migrating without the knowledge of their families as this 19-year-old returnee migrant, named Modou explains:

I had a route and plan before I started the trip. It was the ferryman who had defined it to me. It was a friend who gave me his number, I called him, and we talked, and he told me to call him later. 72 hours later, I recalled it we continued the discussion on the terms of payment and what month I want to leave. I told him next month because I had collected all the money and I would not want to delay the trip. He put me in touch with a bus driver who was going to Agadez and once in Agadez, he put me in touch with another driver who brought me to his home in Libya. It is the ferryman who in all tracing I only followed his instructions.

Female migrants' relationship with cokseurs

The relationship of female migrants and cokseurs is completely different based on gendered power inequalities and the lack of resources that women have at their disposal to pay as they may have little family support. Transactional sexual relations between female migrants and smugglers are common. Ablaye, a cokseur from the department of Vélingara said:

Yes, I have had to work with women, and I like it because women are only beneficial to me, they are not like men who only negotiate the cost of the trip and they can stay with me for two to three months like my wives. They accept everything, even sleeping with me; the last girl I had to work is called Fatima. She is from Tambacounda and there are two women who called me last month to ask for information. One is in Vélingara and the other is a friend who gives her my number. They want to try it..... Like all intermediaries, I am paid in cash, i.e. the migrant gives me money. If it is with women, I sleep with them for one or two months and if they accept, then I take them across.

10.Ghettos: Every man for himself and God for us all!

Cokseurs and passeurs recruit drivers to deliver migrants to certain points in the journey. These drivers are chosen because they have a good knowledge of the route and can sometimes develop friendships with border guards at entry points in transit countries. They can negotiate with border authorities to allow a particular migrant to pass. Drivers have connections with specific ghettos and facilitate the transport of the migrant to the ghetto after which s/he is handed to the smuggler. Passeurs are known to retain particular drivers with whom they work to maintain secrecy and continuity in the system. Migrants can be held in transit zones while waiting for the arrival of a particular driver who works with a particular passeur or cokseur.

Migrants are driven to ghettos which are staging posts along the journey and were referred to as "tranquille" by our interviewees who described them as

Abandoned buildings in the forest, and each network (of cokseurs and passeurs) has its so-called "tranquille" reception area. And to make the differentiation, we can say "Tranquille Diakité" or "Tranquille Touré" or Tranquille Diombera" etc ... There are mafia taxis that deposit people there, most of them are old cars, they are not controlled by the government. Often, it is people who also master the city and roads to bypass the police. But you must know that in these tranquilles each country has its place. In other words, we do not mix nationalities together. There are Guineans apart, Senegalese by themselves, and also women apart, who are often with the representatives of the cokseurs.

As the term tranquille indicates, these places are supposed to be quiet or tranquil, not to attract attention. The police know about the existence of these places but do not intervene as they are involved in the profits themselves.

Cokseurs at the ghetto must be paid 20,000-100,000 FCFA to enter. Each nationality has a representative called "chief" who is linked through another layer of intermediaries to a particular smuggler. Alpha, a returned migrant described the situation in the ghetto in which he stayed *'I can say that in each ghetto there are more than 4 or 5 chiefs. Because there are chiefs who are Peulh, Wolof, Mandingue, Jola and others, who are in charge of welcoming the migrants and who facilitate communication.'* He described further subdivisions within the ghettos and collaborative relations as well as conflict. *'I was in a Senegalese ghetto. It's organized according to zones, for example people from Kolda like us, we had a leader, those from Dakar, and things like that (sic).'*

The conditions in the ghettos are cramped with 9 or 10 migrants sharing a room and no sense of a cohesive community. Amadou, a 42-year-old farmer who became a migrant commented on the mercenary environment in the ghetto.

Yes, in these transit points, the only valid system getting money right away in order to eat or to continue the journey. This is why nothing is free in the transit zones. So, I can say that in the ghettos it is "Every man for himself and God for us all".

It is clear from the interviews that migrants must work to survive, otherwise they starve. Although the accommodation in ghettos is run by brokers on migrant money, they are treated like captive slaves. Migrants work as coffee sellers, clothes washers, hairdressers and petty traders and contribute their labour to maintain the ghetto. As Alpha said *'Yes, all these activities are paid for because most often the migrants work in order to continue their journey, therefore they cannot afford to work for free, and as for the brokers, their survival depends on their activity of mediation. So, I can say that nothing is for free in the transit points.'* In such trying circumstances, religious beliefs assume importance. In one interview, the spiritual role played by the chiefs is mentioned *'He manages the ghetto, takes care of the ghetto and food and makes the preparations more or less mystical before the trip.'*

Only those in ghettos will be put in touch with drivers for the next part of the journey. The chiefs in the ghetto can speak Arabic and they negotiate the terms of the onward passage with Passeurs

and drivers who are often from Libya. They collect money from the migrants and tell them to come to a particular departure point but there were accounts from the migrants of being cheated and the trip not materialising. It is the job of the chiefs to leave the tranquille to find partners who can support him to make the crossing. These partners include, police officers, passeurs and their cokseurs. In maritime migration, the route is generally designed to be a direct navigation without a transit point, but the actors are almost the same. Through their connections the chiefs may also help with forging passports in Mali for a charge of 50,000 FCFA.

The operations of the ghetto are embedded in the local community by providing migrant labour to local projects and also through financial flows. Local people working at ghettos who are citizens of transit countries help the migrants to send and receive money as they cannot access banks because of their irregular legal status. Financial transactions can be stressful because of delays, being robbed or cheated. Alpha said

I can say that the financial conditions are too complicated, because sometimes we saw people who have money problems and whose parents cannot afford to send money to carry on with their trip. There are others, when they are sent money, they don't receive it because they don't have an ID and they rush to see the brokers. And as soon as these brokers withdraw the money, they run away with it, leaving the migrants in the ghettos with nothing. And these brokers do not come back because they have accomplices that they call often to ask if the betrayed migrant has left, so that they can come back to the ghetto.

11. Passeurs

The passeur or smuggler is par excellence the captain and overall coordinator of the journey across the Sahara. Passeurs must possess social capital as well as financial capital to negotiate, bribe and keep on side, border police and other state authorities encountered along the way. He must therefore possess language and communication skills and also have large sums of money at his disposal to start such a business which involves paying hefty bribes and purchasing equipment such as GPS systems. Passeurs have large profit margins in the business which they feel are commensurate with the risks that they take.

To become a passeur, the first step is to recruit and establish a network of active people who can be trusted. Vieux, a 40-year-old smuggler explains how he entered the business

Ha it's very complicated how I became a smuggler, but still I'll try to explain a little how I had become a smuggler. I left Kolda in 2001 and my ambition was to go to Spain. I went through Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria and Morocco. It was in Morocco that I started to carry out this activity of smuggler. But this was possible thanks to a former migrant I found in Morocco whose name is I. M. who was a smuggler and played mediation between Morocco and Spain through the pirogues that took migrants to Spain. That was how he got me involved in his business. And as soon as I started this activity, I sometimes earned

500,000 FCFA a month. It was from this moment that I had decided not to continue my trip to Spain. That's how I became a smuggler.

Passeurs are keen to show that they are responsible and have a strong sense of morality as Hamidou who has a brother in Libya said:

The risks in our company are numerous. Because taking someone's money and if they cannot get to the desired destination, that's a risk. But nobody pays me until he gets to the desired place. Others say they keep money but once they arrive they do not want to pay anymore. There are people so far who have not paid. My brother told me to do nothing. To leave them with their conscience. Sometimes parents of these same people come back to see us for other cases and at this moment we refuse clearly telling them that we do not trust their family who does not have words of honour because they do not did not respect their words. You see God is right. If the migration does not work others pay me back half, others do not pay back.

He goes on to describe how they set the fee depending on the migrant's ability to pay and are therefore not unnecessarily exploitative.

For me the cost of the transaction depends on the discussion with the migrants. Because I do not have a fixed price, the price is discussed according to the migrants or families. Sometimes the cost is up to 400,000 FCFA. But it always depends on our agreement. Because there are families that I know they cannot afford even 100,000 FCFA. If he arrives and he works to repay the debt or sometimes I do it for free. Since it is essential for me to see the young persons succeed.

Another passeur, named Karamba also emphasised the "honesty" of his profession. Speaking of his brother who is also a smuggler, he explained:

He (his brother) has been gone for more than 10 years, he helped a lot of people who were in difficulties. He has rendered services that should be recognised. Moreover, some families are reassured when they know that my brother is assisting their migrant. Even if they do not have the guarantee that the migrant will cross the sea, they are reassured. In fact, if we were not correct with people, we would not have had this form of recognition. When the migrant is stuck, we can make the connection and my brother asks the migrant to call to confirm that he has received the money Many people on the road are deceivers. Our migrants are guided towards people with whom my brother has relationships. They are also working with my brother, entrusting him with migrants. Only once did someone call me on the phone from my brother to get money from a connection. So, there is trust between my brother and them.

Passeurs may play an important role in informing the parents of the whereabouts of their sons, especially if they have left without the family's knowledge.

In a moment the parents come to me to say to me, to listen I have not news of my son, I fear that he left without informing me. Help me to know what has become of him. At this moment I call my brother and sometimes I even send the picture of the kid by WhatsApp. If we find him, we agree to help the family.

Smugglers thus play a complex role; extracting profits from migrants through illegal activity but at the same time maintaining links between the migrant already gone and his family of origin. Thus, when the migrant is trapped in a transit zone and faces financial problems, the smuggler provides reassurance and psychological support for both the migrant and the family.

But the reputation of passeurs in Kolda indicates that they are seen in a less positive light than they would have us believe. Passeurs are locally known as "barbarians". As one participant of a group discussion said: *'because they will leave migrants in the middle of the desert after having stripped them of all their belongings. They do not hesitate to kill to put an end to any attempt at rebellion by migrants to the horrific conditions of the journey across the desert.'* At the same time most migrants agreed that the journey would not be possible without them and they are critical to realising their dreams of reaching Europe.

In order to gain social acceptance among key migration industry actors along critical routes, passeurs make efforts to embed themselves completely in the local culture by learning the local language such as *Hausa* and *Tamaleck*. They may also marry local women and settle down in these transit zones.

Like cokseurs, passeurs have a different relationship with female migrants. The passeur we have nicknamed Djiby, admits that he likes working with women because:

Women are only beneficial to me; they are not like men who are just negotiating the cost of the trip and they can stay with me for two to three months like my wives. They accept everything, even sleeping with me... there are two women who called me last month to ask for information. One is in Vélingara and the other one is a friend who gives her my number. They want to try it.

As we were not able to speak to many migrant women it was difficult to understand the degree of coercion or agency in these activities.

12. The journey

The crossing of the desert is done in "combat" in overloaded pick-up trucks led by smugglers armed with Kalashnikovs who leave in the middle of the night. The guns are meant to protect the smugglers against robbers along the way but also the migrants they are carrying. They fear strong solidarity among migrants and arm themselves to avoid any rebellion during the crossing of the Sahara. Conditions in the desert are extremely dangerous and precarious. Migrants often stand against poles attached to the sides of the van and there is a constant risk of falling over the side. The van drivers are ruthless and if a migrant loses his balance and falls, they do not stop to rescue

him because they have already been paid and there are no legal or moral checks against such behaviour.

The actual organisation of the combat is done by the cokseurs who work under the passeur. Combats may also be organised for jumping fences as Sow describes

Cokseurs organise migrants to form groups in order to make “combats”, of more than 100 people to cross the fence or take a pirogue and cross the sea. So, it is the cokseurs who organise these combats but first they negotiate with the Moroccan border agents. It’s a business that requires a lot of money. Because the cokseurs pay the policemen to withdraw from a section of the fence to let the combat pass. Often, if the crossing fails, it’s because they betrayed each other. Especially when there are problems with shares, they say some have received their share and others have not. Often it’s the cokseurs who try to trick the border officers.

Sow maintains that if there was no collaboration between the chiefs, cokseurs, the Moroccan ‘narres’ and the policemen, nobody could cross the fence without being noticed. According to him, all of these actors receive a share from the smuggling of migrants across the fence.

Extreme Suffering in the desert

In recounting their experiences, migrants talked about the extreme suffering and risk to their lives and repeatedly mentioned that migrants can survive such conditions only if God protects them.

So, we had four days in the desert, and we drove day and night, it was extremely hot during the day as it was cold at night. We were in 4 x 4 vehicles, the chairs at the back of the driver are dismantled. I was among those sitting there, inside. We were all scared since they took out their weapons. In fact, they bring out their weapons as soon as they have doubts, because they know that in case of misunderstanding, they are aware of the solidarity that exists between migrants ... This is how we have advanced until Gadroume, the border between Libya and Niger. The crossing of the Sahara by combat cost me 250,000 FCFA.... Even if a person falls off the vehicle during the trip, the combat does not stop. Only God can save people in the Sahara. It is only God who can save people in the Sahara.

Similar to the migrants from Central America in Hagan’s study who attributed their survival in perilous journeys to a miracle from God, the migrants from Kolda also refer to a higher force that can protect them in the desert. These beliefs gave migrants hope and the will to persevere. The passeurs take no responsibility for the safety of their passengers and more than one migrant mentioned that they did not stop to rescue anyone who lost their balance and fell out. The ability to withstand such conditions and reach the other side safely was again put down to protection from God as Moussa’s account shows:

First of all, its small vehicles and people are overloaded like sheep and the 4WDs drive at speed so often vehicles fall down, but the drivers don't care. We don't stop until the order is given by the head of the convoy in person. Often they have parking points which is a place where all cars will stop for a while to refuel because they have big barrels in each car. That's when people will get out to eat and drink. People suffer during these fights because if a person is put in certain conditions, he may lose hope and that kills a lot of people because if he falls down while the vehicles are driving. Unfortunately, if that happens and drivers don't stop, they continue even if they know someone has fallen. It's a very difficult road so sometimes people die like that in the desert and another danger of this trip is that when the vehicles are driving, they raise the dust to a great height and people don't see anything. Sometimes with the shaking, people also fall down, so it is only God who is able to protect a person from these dangers. In the past it used to be dump trucks that were used to transport the migrants during the fighting, but since the war started, people have stopped using these trucks because they were easy to track and chase, so now they use 4x4s for the journey.

The horrors of the sea

Boat journeys were similarly harrowing. Pirogues or dugout boats are constructed on the shores with the help of local fishermen and tightly crammed with men. Navigation techniques are basic and only the captain has a being pushed overboard were talked about with some being abandoned in the sea as Tapha described.

Then the captain dived in the water to get him back. Fortunately, he had tied himself up with a rope before getting in the water and after he grabbed the guy. He made him go back into the pirogue, after that we tied him up because he was mentally deranged. At first he lashed at someone, but some Ghanaian parents asked the captain to forgive him, he's not going to do it again. The captain said, now if he does it again, nobody will wait for him; we will carry on because we don't have time. They said OK, no problem. We sailed on and later he jumped again in the water, that's how he died, we didn't wait for him. That's how we sailed off to Spain..

Bécaye recalls the horrors of sailing in a pirogue through rough seas. He was put in touch with a "captain" by a Lebou fisherman near Elinkline.

We went shopping on the morning of the departure. We bought some cans and we put in some water, we also bought two bottles of gas and then we went to a house, I don't know the neighbourhood and there were some guys there and I immediately understood that they were passengers. I was also asked to buy a raincoat and a polo shirt because it's cold. The canoe was well equipped with two compasses and satellite radar.

There were a lot of people in the canoe, maybe even about fifty of us, and there were a lot of Fulani from Guinea-Bissau. We left and the sea, hey the sea, the sea. Sometimes you

could see waves as big as a house coming into the pirogue and you would immediately find yourself at the top of the water and fall back into the trough. What I saw was nothing compared to the waves in the camp. The people were shouting, and we were relieving ourselves in the water, we were supplied with water. I drew so much water that I even developed muscles in my arms. We arrived in Spain in the evening. Because a fisherman's boat gave our position and the Spanish sailors came to escort us and we were handed over to the Red Cross. They gave us blankets and when I got out of the dugout I was like a child learning to walk.

Costs

The presence of national and border police along migration routes has increased since extra surveillance measures have been put in place in most West African transit countries. Unsurprisingly this has also created ample opportunity for corruption. Police derive additional illegal income in collusion with smugglers and drivers.

At every border crossing, migrants must pay a "tax" to the border police as they pass through each country. According to migrants' accounts, the policeman is the one who knows how to "reinvent" a law, just to extract money in transit zones. Crossings in Burkina Faso are the most expensive and difficult; there are several check posts and migrants pay on average 40,000 FCFA at each checkpoint, similar sums are extracted in Niger, 30,000 FCFA in Mali and banknotes of 1,000 F, 2000F at various checkpoints all the way to Tripoli. The border police are embedded in the system and further extract money from the migrant rather than protecting him or her.

Alpha mentioned the following costs, *'The total expenses that I paid in the ghettos or transit points was 150,000 FCFA. Because each time you arrive in a ghetto, you have to pay the rights of entry which is sometimes 25,000 FCFA or 20,000 FCFA. I arrived in Mali where I spent 22,500 FCFA, in Burkina 55,000 FCFA, in Niger 30,000 FCFA. And once I had to pay 100,000 FCFA'* (not clear where or for what).

It is difficult to say with precision the costs related to the journey, especially since these costs may vary according to the negotiations between the migrant and various intermediaries and also the different rates offered by them. Our research shows that, on average, at the beginning of migration, the migrant carries with him/her a sum between 105,000 and 250,000 FCFA. As s/he progresses along the migration routes, the expenses increase to amounts ranging from 900,000 to 1500,000 FCFA.

Further large sums may be needed if the migrant is held in transit or kidnapped along the way. The Senegalese compatriot or Gambian neighbour who is supposed to help and support him is often involved in the kidnapping of migrants in complicity with Libyans to claim a ransom. Typically, migrants are beaten, and they call their families who desperately gather money to release him. Money transfers are done through Western Union or Orange Money directly to the broker. While waiting for his release, he is treated like a slave.

The police are often mentioned in stories related to kidnapping and demanding ransoms as accomplices. This returnee tells us about this scam mounted against him:

A smuggler will tell a police officer that someone who works in this or that company has no papers. At this moment the policeman comes to see the head of the enterprise and tells him that such and such a person is a migrant without papers and therefore, at the end of the month, he must give the policeman a payment. At the end of the month, when the migrant asks for his salary, he is told that a policeman has discovered that he has no papers, so his salary is divided, part for him, and another part for the policeman.

Long and complicated journeys

Despite the considerable sums involved, irregular migration journeys from Kolda are rarely linear, easy or quick. Interrupted journeys with long sojourns at transit points were common. In some cases, journeys could span several years, especially when migrants ran out of money on the way either because they were robbed or because they did not have enough to pay various intermediaries.

Aziz who was working as a fisherman in the village before migration embarked on what is a fairly typical journey

Then I left there and went to Niger, I lasted there too because I had a money problem. There's a scrap dealer there and we became friends and I'm starting to learn how to scrap metal little by little. Sometimes he gives me five hundred FCFA, that's the money I kept, and I was doing a small business buying tea and sugar and I sell it until the day God helped me I left Niamey to go to Libya. I spent seven days in the desert, we didn't have anything to eat, we only drank water. That's how we'd managed to make it to Algeria. Over there too the bandits caught us, they asked us to pay three hundred miles (300, 000 FCFA) each, we stayed there in the morning and they beat us until our parents have paid the amount they ask. But God help me, one day a man came there, and he speaks Wolof and I think I understand Wolof too. We started talking to each other and he helped me to escape and asked me to leave but I don't know the way and I stayed there. At night I sleep on the road.

Deportation from transit points or Libya seemed to be common. Amadou a 42-year-old farmer recounts how he was deported after he was robbed of all of his money

It was my older brother himself who had given me 100,000 FCFA for the payment of the marabouts and the sacrifices I had made. But before my departure, I had mobilized the sum of 500,000 FCFA. When I had left the country, I had passed through Mali, Burkina, Niger, Benin, Nigeria and Cameroon. But it was that my money had been stolen, I was totally discouraged and it was because of that that I was repatriated because I had left to explain the case to the Senegalese embassy and they pushed me to come back because I had no solution to overcome the problem.

In one extreme case a migrant from a subsistence farming family had remained a migrant for twenty years, working his way through successive locations and being deported three times. By the time he was deported from Mali in 2017 he had lived and worked in Burkina Faso, Niger, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and South Africa. Stranded migrants usually work in the informal economy of the place where their journey is interrupted to earn money for survival and saving for onward journeys if their families are not able to send them money. The 48-year-old returnee reports, *'When I did not have the money, I was doing masonry in neighbourhoods like all the migrants living in the transit points, before my parents sent me money.'*

13. Extreme suffering and risk are not a deterrent

To our surprise migrants who had endured and survived extreme hardship through the desert and the sea expressed the desire to migrate again. This was partly due to unfulfilled goals, the social shame of failed migration and deportation and their belief in the Almighty seeing them through the journey. There was also a sense of a poor outlook for making a living in rural Senegal due to deteriorating agricultural production and the departure of so many able-bodied men.

Bécaye who sailed in a precarious pirogue all the way to Spain said he would go again but by land,

Yes. I acquired a cow today. I'll try to build up a couple of animals and I'll sell one to go back. I don't know when, but I know I'll go back. This time I'll try the road. I don't recommend the sea. At least not me. If you hear somewhere that I've had something to do with water, it's because I've washed or drank it. But me and water is over now.

Aziz who had survived starvation in the Sahara and being robbed told the research teams that he was planning to remigrate because he saw no future in Kolda.

The difficulties that I met there are enormous and this time if it doesn't work I will stop for good and come back to continue my business. I'm going back to try my luck again this time... But also, today many young people don't want to stay in the village anymore and consequently the old people of the village don't have any more support for the work in the fields. Even my family never agree to my trip. When I talked about it with my brother, he asked me to stay but I didn't listen. But sometimes it is important because many people have succeeded in this trip. For example, some families in this village have now stopped farming because their sons have succeeded in this trip and they are covering the daily expenses of the family and they are starting to build big buildings in their families.

His plan was to work with the same smuggler again to earn money and migrate onwards.

Yes, I'm going to leave again and at the same time I'm going to try to work with smugglers. I know that Sylla is already working with a network and I myself have already worked with Sylla. I also know the little Wolof who helped me to escape. If I agree with these people, I could also control part of the road.

These accounts raise questions on how well policy makers are understanding migrant attitudes to risk and whether the heavy investments made in risk information campaigns are justified.

14. Conclusion

This study has yielded a unique insight into the structure and functioning of the migrant smuggling industry in Kolda and provided empirical information on irregular migration pathways, the different actors involved, their modes of operation, money exchange and stages of the journey. Migration is a rite of passage for men and successful migration is seen as a mark of manhood and being a good son and provider for the family. There are complex reasons behind the decision to migrate which include family and individual aspirations as well as a way of rescuing one's honour.

Secondly, the findings visiblize the role of women in irregular migration and show how deeply they are involved in what was hitherto regarded mainly as a male activity. Although women make up only a fraction of irregular migrants due to the stigmatisation of independent female migration, they are involved in facilitating, supporting, financing journeys and sourcing Marabouts. Such a gendered perspective helps us to elucidate a broader and more complex picture of migration where women are a critical part of the infrastructure of migration or the overall system which facilitates men's journeys.

Third the research shows that migrants and migration intermediaries relate to each other in a variety of ways, occasionally with hazy boundaries, moving in and out of each other's roles. Therefore, the smuggling industry was not always a distinct and clearly structured entity. Different parts of the industry could work together without knowing each other or having a clear and stable structure; coming together as needed and maintaining separate spheres of work in order to evade detection. Cokseurs and passeurs were disliked and not trusted by migrants but regarded as essential for the success of their mission.

In the absence of any legal protection and a completely mercenary environment, the outcomes of irregular migration depend on chance. Migrants must depend emotionally and psychologically on religious beliefs and prayers that give meaning to their adventures and offer succour during difficult times. It is hardly surprising then that migrants and their families were seen to place such faith in the Marabouts' blessings and their destiny as ordained by God. Those who survived and succeeded in accumulating enough money to make the crossing to Europe were perceived to be the blessed and lucky ones. On the other hand those who had failed or had been deported attributed these outcomes to fate, jealous relatives bringing bad luck or not having one's parents blessings. EU policies and barriers to migration rarely figured in these interpretations of the successes and failures of migration.

Irregular migrants derived spiritual and emotional comfort through the teachings of Islam when faced with numerous, severe and arbitrary risks including forced labour, extortion, beatings, abandonment, starvation, theft and destitution. They sought protection from God by mobilising

Marabouts and seeking strength in their potions and rituals. But at the same time, they were exercising agency in the way that they negotiated and worked with different actors in the smuggling industry who could help them achieve their dream in highly adverse circumstances in the sea and desert.

The degree of control that migrants have over their bodies varies over the course of journey and is inextricably bound with the numerous intermediaries that they encounter along the way. These intermediaries play complex roles of both facilitating mobility and exploiting and immobilising migrants. They offered them a degree of protection in the desert through the ghetto economy, albeit in exploitative ways. The experiences of male and female migrants appear to be very different based on the limited evidence that we were able to gather. While men had to pay large sums of money in cash, women engaged in transactional sexual relations as they may not have been able to mobilise money from the sale of cows and other assets controlled by men.

The opportunities for corruption were enormous and border police as well as local police were implicated in illicit activities including kidnappings and ransoms, “reinventing” rules to extract “taxes” at transit points and false accusations against migrant workers in Libya in collusion with smugglers to extract bribes. The role of the state in clandestine migration is apparent and it is hoped that these findings will stimulate more research on this topic.

The research found that repeated deportations may force people to become immobile and re-establish their original occupations of agriculture and animal husbandry but that does not extinguish their desire to migrate. Experiences of extremely difficult journeys and a real risk to life did not deter migrants from wanting to leave again. This was due to a combination of the shame of failed migration, not seeing a viable future in rural areas and unfulfilled dreams.

15. Policy recommendations

Current policy approaches are focused on limiting irregular migration through information campaigns and the criminalisation of migration intermediaries. As this research has shown, these measures have had limited success for complex reasons including religious interpretations of risk; family needs and personal aspirations; as well as the perceived lack of remunerative options locally. Although Senegal is often regarded as one of the most politically stable countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, its economy has been in a protracted “crisis” due to brutal structural adjustment programmes and economic liberalisation which have led to widespread impoverishment and precarity¹⁰. In such a context, international migrants have now become the symbol of success and they are celebrated in popular culture such as songs. There are marked inequalities between rural and urban areas with rural poverty rates as high as 66%¹¹. More than 75% of the population depends on agriculture and the government with the support of the UN Food and Agriculture

¹⁰ <http://focus-migration.hwwi.de/Senegal.2636.0.html?&L=1>

¹¹ <https://borgenproject.org/senegal-poverty-rate/>

Organization has also introduced projects to develop more work opportunities for youth in agriculture to prevent migration to the cities and internationally¹².

The tragedy of migrant deaths and the enormous sacrifices of the families to support the migration of their loved ones cannot be overstated. There is clearly a need to craft a different approach to managing migration, reducing its risks and improving its benefits. This needs to be done with all stakeholders at the table, not just European governments, international agencies and the government of Senegal. The voices of those for whom the policies are being made – migrants, returnees and their families – need to be heard to find lasting solutions. Three areas of policy, research and interventions are critical:

- 1) More policy analysis and historical research is needed to understand the underlying structural inequalities that drive migration and what can be done to address these through for example improving the terms of trade for Senegalese producers and analysing migration in a holistic way as part of the wider global political economy.
- 2) The objective of boosting agricultural production is sound but it cannot be expected to halt migration unless it is accompanied by other societal changes that will fulfil the aspirations of young people for a different way of living, access to education and for women, more freedom and equality in the labour market. Concerted efforts are needed in these areas together with investment in the primary sector to create a society that young people will not want to move away from.
- 3) Third, opening up more legal opportunities to migrate. The government of Senegal is already working on this. This effort can be boosted through more research on the contribution of Senegalese to receiving countries so that they are welcomed rather than seen as a burden.
- 4) Fourth, there is a need to start conversations within migrant communities (aspiring migrants, returned migrants, deportees, migrant families, local NGOs) on culturally sensitive issues such as the migration of women, failed migrations and the role of the Marabout and migration outcomes. Although it is very difficult to bring about change in cultural perceptions related to such topics, a start can be made. The experience of gender sensitisation programmes indicates that small shifts in attitudes can be achieved over a period of time. Similar shifts can be aimed for with regards to the areas identified above.
- 5) Finally, there is an urgent need for the protection of migrants at transit points by drawing attention to their experiences highlighted in this paper and bringing international agencies such as the IOM, International Rescue Committee and migrant rights groups to intervene to reduce human suffering.

¹² <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/resources/resources-details/en/c/1178399/>

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About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

Migrating out of Poverty is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions – and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of **Migrating out of Poverty** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and their countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world-renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The **Migrating out of Poverty** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters, with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

Migrating out of Poverty
University of Sussex
Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QN, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1273 873535
Email: migrationrpc@sussex.ac.uk
Web: <http://migratingoutofpoverty.dfid.gov.uk/>
Twitter: @migrationrpc



