

Localized Transnationalism: The Paradoxes of Migration in the Age of Involuntary Immobility

Transnacionalismo localizado: las paradojas de la migración en la era de la inmovilidad involuntaria

Rita Sobczyk¹, Rosa Soriano Miras², & Andrés Caballero Calvo³

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the phenomenon of “localized transnationalism.” The concept refers to the prolonged and intense maintenance of cross-border connections by migrants whose capacity for geographic mobility is very limited. The study is based on ethnographic research which focused on Senegalese migrants in southern Spain. The results contribute to the debate on transnationalism by providing empirical evidence which demonstrates that migrants can engage in transnational practices even if they are excluded, due to administrative and economic obstacles, from transnational mobility.

Keywords: 1. localized transnationalism, 2. Senegalese, 3. Islam, 4. religion, 5. Spain.

RESUMEN

El presente estudio analiza el fenómeno que hemos denominado con el concepto de “transnacionalismo localizado”, que hace referencia al prolongado e intenso mantenimiento de vínculos a través de fronteras por migrantes cuya movilidad geográfica es muy limitada. Se trata de una realidad detectada en el marco de una investigación etnográfica realizada con migrantes senegaleses en el sur de España. El estudio contribuye al debate sobre el transnacionalismo aportando datos empíricos que demuestran que los migrantes pueden involucrarse en prácticas transnacionales incluso cuando son excluidos, debido a obstáculos administrativos y económicos, de la movilidad transnacional.

Palabras clave: 1. transnacionalismo localizado, 2. senegaleses, 3. islam, 4. religión, 5. España.

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¹Universidad del Norte, Colombia, rsobczyk@uninorte.edu.co, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6897-3568>

²Universidad de Granada, Spain, rsoriano@ugr.es, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8296-2382>

³Universidad del Norte, Colombia, andrescaballero@uninorte.edu.co, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4382-0055>



INTRODUCTION

The current reality of migration is often referred to as “the age of involuntary immobility” (Carling, 2002, p. 5). National borders become highly permeable for the transit of symbols, ideas, knowledge, products and financial flows. However, the official barriers to mobility of a large part of the world’s population are more rigid than ever in history. Massimo Livi Bacci (2012) describes the development of these hindrances by differentiating two phases of globalization that affected the migratory environment. The first phase is identified between 1870 and the beginning of World War I, when the surplus of workers in Europe, the land deficit and other local factors drove large migratory flows to territories conquered by colonial empires; America was the main destination. These flows largely represented an escape mechanism that allowed facing the population pressure that arose as a result of the demographic transition.

The second phase of globalization, initiated after World War II, is represented by a great diversification in origins and destinations of the migratory flows. The borders of the states were relaxed in order to facilitate the mobility of capital, goods, services and ideas. Paradoxically, in the current era, in which in many aspects borders become increasingly permeable, this second phase of globalization has not been accompanied by a parallel generalized easing of official barriers to people’s movement. Despite the strong population growth and the demographic pressures that affect multiple developing countries, especially since the second half of the 20th century, we currently do not find an escape valve-mechanism similar to that taken advantage of by the European populations of recent past.

It should be emphasized that the official barriers to people’s flows hinder the movement, although they do not prevent it. According to data from the United Nations (2017), currently 3.4% of the world’s population lives in a different country from the one they were born in. At the same time, socio-economic and political transformations can result in periods of relative openness towards the arrival of foreign populations. Spain in the late 1990’s and early 21st century is a good example of that. The current migratory context is also characterized by the increasingly widespread use of media and transport, which facilitate migrants the keeping of social ties across borders. The extensive literature on transnationalism, developed from the classic text of Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994), has allowed to glimpse at different angles of this phenomenon (Vertovec, 2009; Waldinger, 2013).

In migratory studies, Senegalese populations have become one of the emblematic examples of transnational community (Jabardo, 2006; Kaag, 2013; Kane, 2011; Moreno, 2013; Riccio, 2008; Sow, 2004). This research explores the paradoxical reality of Senegalese migrants who are involved in intense transnational practices, but whose capacity for mobility is strongly hindered by administrative and economic obstacles.

The first section of this article provides a basic representation of Senegalese migration, necessary to contextualize the results of this research. In the following section, a review is carried out on the literature that focuses on the main areas of the transnational practices of Senegalese migrants. Subsequently, the methodological section of the study is addressed, and we explain how the process of data analysis led to theoretical approaches that problematize the existing uses of the term “transnationalism.” The empirical material that gave place to the conceptual proposal defended in this article is presented in the sections thereafter.

The data collected shows that the analysis of transnationalism in the case of the Senegalese diaspora cannot ignore the experience of many migrants who, despite having strong ties with their country of origin and with other compatriots in various countries, cannot undertake transnational mobility. The development of what we call “localized transnationalism” captures this reality, pointing out at the development of intense ties across borders by migrants characterized by limited opportunities for geographical transit.

FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SENEGALESE MIGRATION

The intercontinental flows of Senegalese populations acquired relevance especially since the 1980s. Initially, France was the main destination for their immigration to Europe. Subsequently, Italy and Spain became the destinations of international flows, so the prominence of the old colonial metropolis decreased. In the case of Spain, Mercedes Jabardo (2006) distinguishes two main migratory waves. The first had Catalonia as its main destination, especially its agricultural activity areas. In these flows, at the end of the 1970s, the Soninke, Mandinka and Halpulaaren populations stood out. The second wave, which began in the 1980s, is characterized by a greater representation of Wolof migrants and the importance of their employment in commerce. The participation of sellers who made recurring commercial trips between Spain and Senegal, and who were involved in transnational labor activities, was identified (Sow, 2006).

In Spain, Senegalese became the largest sub-Saharan nationality in 2003. According to the latest censuses, the Senegalese population has multiplied almost fivefold in a single decade, from 11,540 in 2001 (Statistics National Institute, 2001) to 57,735 in 2011 (Statistics National Institute, 2011). Currently, the number of people of Senegalese nationality in Spain amounts to 62,716 (Statistics National Institute, 2016).

Although it is a heterogeneous population, we can distinguish some features that differentiate the Senegalese diaspora at the collective level. According to data from the last census of 2011, men constituted 80% of the Senegalese people in Spain (Statistics National Institute, 2011). It is a very young community, since only 13% are over 45 years old. One of the main causes for the young sector of the population to be so highly represented in this exodus is their economic precariousness.

The understanding of Senegalese transnationalism is not possible without analyzing the religious field: 90% of the population in Senegal are of Muslim denomination, so the role of Islam is also reflected in the migratory context. The majority of Senegalese are part of Muslim brotherhoods. These are highly hierarchical organizations, headed by religious leaders, called marabouts or *cheikhs*. Marabouts are perceived as mediators between Allah and his disciples. Senegal is sometimes called “the paradise of brotherhoods” (Bop, 2005, p. 1104), reflecting how relevant is the role of brotherhoods in the country, both economically and politically. Additionally, they frequently become mediators between society and the State and, in recent decades, have become strongly involved in the diaspora.

The two brotherhoods with the largest number of followers in Senegal are Tijaniyya and Mouridiyya. The latter, which emerged during French colonialism, has been the focus of academic research due to its strong political and economic influence. In the literature specialized in migratory studies, the great attention devoted to migrants belonging to Mouridiyya stands out (Bava, 2002; Ebin, 1995; Kaag, 2013; Riccio, 2004) as well as the links between the brotherhood and commercial networks both in Senegal and in the international context. Tijaniyya, unlike Mouridiyya, has its origins outside the territory of Senegal. It emerged in Algeria in 1781 and is currently the largest brotherhood in West Africa. In Senegal, its followers revolve around native branches of the organization, created by Senegalese religious leaders.

SENEGALESE TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES: THEORETICAL DEBATES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

In specialized literature, the Senegalese have frequently been described as a population tending heavily towards transnational migration (Jabardo, 2006; Kaag, 2013; Kane, 2011; Moreno, 2013; Riccio, 2008; Sow, 2004). The understanding of this tendency would not be possible without taking into account the influence of religion. Researchers have paid special attention to the role played by religion in fostering ties across borders by Muslim brotherhoods, especially the Mouridiyya (Kaag, 2013; Riccio, 2008). It should also be noted that religion has been strongly linked to the economic activities of transnational traders (Babou, 2002; Bava, 2003; Diouf, 2000).

Senegalese transnationalism also has an important political aspect. Several studies by Monika Salzbrunn (2004, 2013), which analyze both the contexts of Europe and the United States, capture the ways in which the Senegalese occupy public space in host territories; for example, during holidays, creating a space for political and religious expressions of the diaspora. At the same time, and despite the frequent perception that political intervention in the countries of origin of the migrants is incompatible with their successful adaptation to the country hosting them, the Senegalese case shows that it is not necessarily so. Along

these lines, the study by Green, Sarrasin and Maggi (2014) provides empirical data indicating that the desire to integrate into the host society in the Senegalese case is positively associated with transnational political activity. In the extensive literature on Senegalese transnationalism, there are also works dedicated to migrant projects and initiatives focused on the development of their place of origin (Grillo & Riccio, 2004; Sall, 2010).

The link between transnationalism and family life is another important line of research; for example, the studies of Dan Rodríguez (2002) on the dynamics of couples, or the analysis of paternity and maternity practices across borders among the Senegalese in Italy by Fedora Gasparetti (2011).

This brief review of the studies that shows the different angles of Senegalese transnationalism provides merely an outline of the dynamic field of research that aims at understanding the particular character of this diaspora, so revealing in terms of emerging trends in human migration. However, the debate about the scope and specificity of transnationalism, in general, remains controversial.

This study is part of a trend that advocates for a vision of transnationalism closer to the realities experienced by migrants. Among others, Roger Waldinger (2013) argues that in the analysis of transnational trends we must take into account the whole set of processes that hinder ties across borders. Both the studies rooted in methodological nationalism and those that celebrate the impact of transnationalism often adopt overly simplistic views of social reality.

Methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002), based on the understanding of nation-states as natural containers of social life and national society as the basic unit of analysis, hinders the comprehension of transnational ties. Nonetheless, and according to Waldinger (2013), researchers also have overestimated the impact of processes that take place crossing borders, highlighting a phenomenon that actually affects only a minority of migrants and that, in the long term and as the descendants of migrants are born, loses strength. Although “symbolic ethnicity” may persist, nation states “circumscribe the social connections of immigrants while transforming their identities” (Waldinger, 2013, p. 215).

The concept of localized transnationalism proposed in this study arises precisely from the discrepancy observed among the body of research that insist on the strength of Senegalese transnationalism and the reality recorded during field work, marked by a great absence of geographical mobility. The analysis provided below is based on ethnographic research conducted between September 2011 and February 2014 in Villanueva, in southern

Spain.⁴ Spanish was the main language of communication with informants. This study builds upon previous research on Senegalese migrants conducted between 2006 and 2008. In addition to the participant observation, 81 in-depth interviews were also conducted.⁵

The participant observation was carried out in multiple contexts, which allowed covering the main spaces in which the daily life of a broad spectrum of participants takes place. The understanding of their experience in Spain would not be possible without the willingness of many participants to share their stories in the privacy of their homes. Visits to religious institutions, such as Muslim brotherhood facilities and other spaces used for the most important celebrations throughout the year, were also important. Finally, social relationships were observed, both within and beyond the Senegalese community, in contexts of labor, neighborhood and public spaces.

It should be noted that the case analyzed may differ from the reality of the Senegalese diaspora in other destinations. In countries with a longer Senegalese immigration history, the time elapsed since the settlement of the first migrants can help reduce mobility barriers. In addition, a greater proportion of people nationalized and inserted regularly in the labor market translates into greater possibilities to visit the country of origin for prolonged periods, and systematically.

Although the concept of transnationalism has successfully entered the scientific vocabulary, its use to denote very diverse phenomena can contribute to diminish its analytical value. That is why it is so important to refine the term, paying special attention to the heterogeneity of social realities that it is intended to cover. Pursuing this goal, this study proposes the differentiation of localized transnationalism from other forms of transnationalism. The concept is defined below, and its usefulness is exemplified in the analysis of the Senegalese case.

INVOLUNTARY IMMOBILITY AND LOCALIZED TRANSNATIONALISM

The results are structured around two main themes. In the first instance, the case of involuntary immobility and the factors that cause it are addressed. Subsequently, data on social patterns that allow answering the following question are analyzed: How is it possible that intense ties are established across borders by a population highly restricted from

⁴The name of the location where the study was conducted has been changed to guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

⁵Intentional sampling has been applied in the study, and so the emerging hypotheses derived from data analysis guided the process of searching for participants. The final sample includes the diversity of migratory profiles, while reflecting the socio-demographic characteristics of the Senegalese settled in Spain.

mobility? We focus on two fundamental areas for the development of localized transnationalism in the Senegalese case: the religious field and that of family life.

The concept of localized transnationalism refers to the prolonged and intense keeping of ties across borders by migrants whose chances of participating in transnational mobility are very small or even non-existent. Understanding the factors that limit movement opportunities is crucial to understand how this phenomenon develops.

The research of Núñez and Heyman (2007) provides a useful view of the processes of interaction between the various factors of macro and micro character that can lead to the immobilization of individuals. Migration policies at the supranational and national level, political persecution, lack of geographical knowledge of the destination, or barriers to access transportation, among others, can not only hinder the border crossing but, frequently, limit mobility even at local level in the host country. This is the “second state of immobility” (Haugen, 2012) that characterizes people who managed to emigrate but again get spatially “trapped,” this time in the territory of destination.

This research recorded the persistence of strong ties with the country of origin and with other Senegalese individuals dispersed in various host countries. Despite the relevance of these links, it was identified how in many cases the opportunities to get involved in transnational mobility are very small. The intense movement across borders is present within the population analyzed but, at the same time, it is a practice only possible for a small minority. Only migrants who are economically well-off and under regularized administrative situation have the resources that allow them to travel, while most people are excluded from this practice.

Among the factors that hinder mobility, we must highlight legal barriers. In the case of many migrants, the difficulty in regularizing their administrative situation has fundamental consequences for their life journeys. Facing legal boundaries has an impact on the emergence of a sense of distance from the host society:

That’s why I told you that I will never be a Spaniard [...]. [Here] they always check if I have papers or not, so they can kick me out of here if I don’t [...] I’m OK, but my friends don’t and it feels the same [...] Most people who don’t have papers are always like that and for those who have papers it’s all the same, sometimes they give you papers and then they take them away [...] The most serious problem of the Senegalese here are papers (Mamadou, Tijaniyya, personal communication, August 8, 2013).

Criticism of methodological nationalism may influence us to ignore the strength of the identification categories used by States. Population classification processes carried out by state administrations can have very tangible consequences on people’s lives. Being in the category of “non-EU foreigner” implies differentiated rights and obligations, impacting on the possibilities of traveling and getting a job. If the migrant population is continually

reminded of its origin, through specific rights, obligations and risks, it is likely that this origin will rise more strongly as a vital referential.

Administrative regularization is a fundamental requirement to be able to undertake mobility. According to Eva Evers Rosander (2006), the desire to obtain Spanish citizenship in the case of many Senegalese women in Tenerife does not have much to do with the desire to settle in the host state; it is really about the possibility of overcoming legal obstacles to mobility. Holding citizenship in the destination country becomes the best way to cross borders freely. It is, in short, a strategy to overcome the limitations imposed by barriers to human mobility.

However, the legal problem constitutes only one of the obstacles to access transnational mobility. For many people, the price of the connections for transportation to Senegal is too high for them to afford it. The economic crisis that has hit Spain over the last decade affected the immigrant population in a particularly serious way (Reher & Sanz, 2011). Migrants who can move between the country of origin and the destination country on a recurring basis are for the most part those who are stable not only in terms of administrative situation, but also of employment.

Despite all this, this study showed that the barriers described do not represent a complete exclusion from participation in transnational practices. We face a paradox: the existence of strong ties across borders, attesting to the permeability of national borders, and the parallel limitation of mobility between countries, leading to the development of localized transnationalism.

In the Senegalese case, localized transnationalism arises, above all, from two factors. In the first place, there is a small minority of social actors who enjoy freedom of movement and who are strongly involved in transnational mobility, connecting with the immobile majority in the country of origin and with other migrants dispersed throughout various countries of destination. Second, there is a strong participation in the society of origin, even if they are not physically there. Through the regular use of various means of remote communication, the circulation of elements of material culture and economic participation in the destination, through remittances and investments, the daily lives of many migrants are linked to the daily context of the home country.

The social actors involved in mobility across borders, who contribute to the development of transnational practices on behalf of the immobilized majority, can be divided into two main groups. The first one includes the more well-off Senegalese, who can afford recurring and regular trips between Spain and their home country. It is a population that practically lives between the two countries, enjoying the advantages of both. Their case affects the development of aspirations by other migrants, as it demonstrates the feasibility of a migration project that connects the country of origin with that of destination.

The second group includes those social actors who actively seek to foster the link between migrants and the country of origin. The role of religious leaders in Muslim brotherhoods is particularly relevant. Their recurring visits, as well as the development of religious projects and organizations, strengthen the links with Senegal.

Following the critical views on the scope of transnationalism, one might ask why use this term if transnational mobility is so scarce. However, doing away with this concept in the Senegalese case could make us lose sight of the richness of the practices that connect migrants with their origin and with other countries of destination in the diaspora. The term helps us appreciate cross-border connections without falling into exaggerating the scope of transnationalism, especially when it comes to geographical mobility.

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS AS MEDIATORS OF TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIONS

The tension between the dynamics of immobility and the aspirations of individuals in the population analyzed in this study represents the basis for the emergence of localized transnationalism. As it will be shown in the following sections, migrants “trapped” in a restricted space find ways to stay deeply connected with the places they physically have limited access to.

Muslim organizations and *cheikhs* —religious guides within the brotherhoods—, contribute fundamentally to the involvement in the transnational space of “immobile” migrants. Identification as “Senegalese” means that Senegalese of various religious denominations frequently participate in meetings with the most important leaders. It should be emphasized that at the same time that the link with the country of origin is reinforced, within the framework of religious institutions, ties with the host society are also promoted.

The visits of the most important religious leaders are part of international tours carried out periodically. During meetings with said leaders, funds are usually collected for collective projects and to finance their mobility through the diaspora. Among others, Villanueva’s Senegalese population contributes financially to the construction of a mosque in Dakar, as well as to the University of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (UCAB) in Touba.

In the studied area, large sections are rented in hotels or in public facilities with suitable meeting spaces for the most important religious celebrations. The transfer of religious activities to large spaces takes place several times a year, including the celebration of the Grand Magal⁶ and the Gammu.⁷ Throughout the year there are visits by religious leaders

⁶The Grand Magal commemorates the end of the exile of Mouridiyya founder Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba. It is a holiday celebrated in Senegal by pilgrimage to the sacred capital of the brotherhood, the city of Touba.

⁷Prophet Muhammad’s birthday celebration.

of lesser social renown and, in these cases, the meetings are held in the facilities of the brotherhoods.

The relationship between the most esteemed guides and the faithful is predominantly perceived as a teacher-student relationship. This perception of religious guides as wise men who help guide behavior in everyday life is often confirmed by their followers, although we must not forget that critical voices to their activity do exist.

The normative role of *cheikhs* represents one of the main aspects of their activity that promotes transnational stances among Senegalese migrants. On the one hand, taking into account these meetings with leaders allows us to underline the importance of keeping with the ways of thinking and acting learned within the society of origin. On the other hand, religious leaders often assume the role of mediators between the diaspora and the destination society.

Many of the testimonies collected emphasize that *cheikhs* “refresh their mind,” just as their message also addresses specific difficulties arising from living abroad. In these religious activities explicit references are introduced regarding the problems that many migrants face in their daily life. It is remarkable how they attempt to address the difficult relations with the authorities as related to street vending from the point of view of Islam. The incorporation of the legal and economic obstacles faced by many migrants within religious messages, regardless of their affiliation to specific brotherhoods, makes them foster the feeling of belonging to the same national community sharing both problems and challenges.

The analysis of the attendance to the visits of the most important *cheikhs* and holidays throughout the year corroborates the conclusion that Muslim celebrations allow for the fostering of internal ties between migrants, regardless of their affiliation to specific religions and how deeply they identify with said religion.

First of all, we are Senegalese [...] it makes no difference that one is Mourid and the other is Tijani. No. So when we celebrate Magal, not only Mourids come. It is for all Muslims in the world [...] We are Senegalese before all else. We come from the same country (Papa, Mouridiyya, personal communication, July 16, 2012).

Religious celebrations allow meeting with compatriots and listening to speeches that refer to difficulties shared abroad. Some participants even travel to celebrations organized outside the local sphere, visiting cities such as Madrid or Barcelona. As stated by Sophie Bava and Stephania Capone (2010), transnationalism does not have to weaken self-identification in national terms. In the case studied, the visits of the *cheikhs* allow linking Senegalese migrants dispersed in different destinations, thus promoting the perception of belonging to a diaspora strongly linked to the country of origin.

Following the conceptual framework of Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1998), it was observed that meetings with religious leaders reaffirm the ethical and emotional dimensions of collective self-understanding. The relevance of the first dimension is evidenced in the testimonies in which Islam is defended as a source of cultural values, norms and patterns that are associated with the country of origin. The ethical side dissociates from the ascription to a specific religious organization. The same can be seen regarding the emotional dimension of meetings with the *cheikhs*; a collective perception of “we” is created there, which crosses the boundaries of the distinct religious belongings of its participants. Perhaps the most powerful example of this reality is the following passage from an interview with a Senegalese Catholic who explains her participation in meetings with Muslim religious guides: “It is teaching. It tells us what we have to do outside our country” (Awa, Senegalese Catholic migrant, personal communication, September 17, 2012).

Awa attends the meetings organized by her Muslim compatriots because she considers that their message focuses mainly on the values and norms prevailing in Senegal, and on the teaching of how to act in the migratory context. Her experience resembles that reported by Rogaiia Mustafá Abusharaf (2002) about migrants from Sudan in Canada and the United States: the study shows that Sudanese Christians often participate in Muslim activities organized by their countrymen. According to the testimonies recorded, the cultural heritage linked to their home country and belonging to a racial minority within a predominantly white society unites them in spite of internal religious divisions.

The reaffirmation of the identification as Senegalese also takes place within the framework of the Grand Magal and the Gammu. In the locality of this study, the Grand Magal —organized by the Mourids— and the Gammu —organized by the Tijanis to celebrate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad— are held in mass meetings, which require changing venues to larger spaces than the headquarters of the brotherhoods or the local mosque.⁸

The marked social character of the Magal and Gammu attract hundreds of attendees from various affiliations, as well as many Senegalese who are rather critical towards the brotherhoods.

We all meet many times [...] These are the Senegal holidays that we celebrate here [...] If there is a religious holiday [...] we pause all our activities and participate as we can [...] Since I came here, I participate in these holidays every year [he refers to Magal and Gammu], because if it is the Feast of the Lamb or Ramadan we only meet in the morning, we pray, then everyone goes to their house, to cook and to celebrate with their family; in the afternoon, we

⁸Participants agree that other festivities such as Korité (Eid al-Fitr) and Tabaski (Eid al-Adha), although not of less importance, are usually celebrated in more intimate spaces, with closer people and by attending the mosque.

also go to each other's houses to greet and ask for forgiveness between us [...] When the holidays come, all my thoughts are directed there (Lamine, Tijaniyya, personal communication, September 1, 2013).

It should be stressed that the level of involvement in religious organizations varies, with positions ranging from devout participation in the directive structures of the *da'iras*, to very critical attitudes towards the brotherhoods and some religious guides. Only a minority gets involved in institutional activities on a regular basis. Therefore, the visits of religious guides and the celebration of the Grand Magal and the Gammu contribute to the reaffirmation of collective identification as Senegalese.

Large religious celebrations not only contribute to fostering unity among the Senegalese, but also become a source of strengthening ties with the destination society. The visits of the most renowned *cheikhs* are also used for meeting with the authorities of the host context, who are invited to participate in the celebrations organized by migrants. In addition, religious leaders represent migrants at meetings in public facilities in the city. The undertaking of mediation between the population and the state constitutes an activity historically developed on a large scale by the most important brotherhoods in Senegal. In the migratory context, religious organizations and their leaders continue to perform this function.

The Mouridiyya *da'ira*⁹ in the city of this study has sought to establish good relations with local authorities from the beginning, acquiring the role of spokesperson for the Senegalese population. The space of this religious organization is sometimes used to hold meetings with city council employees, to discuss issues that affect the Senegalese population settled therein. The *da'ira* assumes in a way the role of the representative body for migrants.

One of the most serious issues is that of administrative irregularity, which hinders labor insertion and freedom of movement, even within the national territory itself. When the need to move to another location arises, the use of public transportation can become a high-risk activity due to frequent controls carried out by the authorities at the stations. The *da'ira* looks for ways to face this kind of problems at the collective level. Among others, the need to mobilize to request the opening of a Senegalese consulate in Villanueva was raised, which would minimize the need of traveling to other cities for administrative purposes.

The religious field contributes to forging multiple belongings. Large celebrations encourage collective identification as Senegalese, a context in which the country of origin, and not belonging to specific religious organizations, constitutes the common denominator of most participants. At the same time, the participation of the host society in these events

⁹The *da'ira* is the basic organizational unit of a brotherhood.

is actively sought after, which demonstrates the relevance attributed to the ties with the receiving country.

Despite the different stances assumed before the brotherhoods,¹⁰ religious celebrations are still a means of collective reaffirmation. The visits of religious leaders turn into a context in which to strengthen ties with other Senegalese, both in Senegal and in the diaspora. *Cheikhs* are perceived as wise who guide migrants in their emigration, helping not to miss the predominant ways of thinking and behaving in the society of origin. Many participants insisted that Muslim holidays allow them to remain connected with the country of origin, even in the case of a small minority of Catholic Senegalese, who also participate in these meetings. Therefore, national origin structures the composition of those attending the great religious celebrations; although, we must not forget the minority presence—qualitatively relevant—of members of the destination society.

THE EVERYDAY CONTEXT AND TIES ACROSS BORDERS

This section addresses the main daily practices that foster links across borders in the case of migrants who are in the aforementioned “second state of immobility” (Haugen, 2012). The predominant force of transnational social relations and economic ties developed around family values stands out among Senegalese migrants, which contributes to the emergence of transnational families. The ethnographic material collected demonstrates the widespread presence of a desire to return. The possibility of overcoming obstacles to mobility and traveling to the country of origin thus becomes an important component of the imaginary about what a “successful” migration project means.

Despite the ongoing debate on the novel nature of transnational practices (Faist, 1998; Vertovec, 2009), there is no doubt that advances in communications and transport currently offer unprecedented possibilities to stay connected to the home country. Among our participants, the great weight attributed to the maintenance of daily contact with people close to them in Senegal has been stressed. In addition to the use of media such as telephones (for example, via Skype or WhatsApp), in some cases on a daily basis, the commitment to send remittances to family members also stands out. According to World Bank data, in 2011, Senegal received 1,614 million U.S. dollars in the form of remittances (Ratha, Eigen-Zucchi, & Plaza, 2016).

However, support, both financial and psychological, can also flow in the opposite direction. The circle of closest people consulted in times of difficulty can be sustained

¹⁰It should be noted that, despite the importance of religious leaders and organizations in mediation with the host society and the authorities, there is a minority of participants who show very critical positions with the participation of the brotherhoods in the political sphere. They argue that state authorities, and not religious institutions, should assume the role of representation of migrants.

precisely thanks to transnational ties. The economic crisis resulted in some migrants, instead of sending money to their country of origin, having to ask their relatives in Senegal for help in order to withstand economic difficulties and continue with their migration project.

The support received from the society of origin is also psychological. The case of Ndis, can serve as example of this, an informant who arrived in Europe seven years ago, and when in problematic situations, he asks for help from his mother who lives in Senegal, or his brother settled in Switzerland. The importance attributed to kinship ties has an impact on the fact that, despite the passage of time, many migrants keep very intense contact with their country of origin and with the diaspora in other destinations of Senegalese migration.

The data analyzed shows how intense family relationships can be kept even without the chance of traveling and meeting face to face. Fama's case exemplifies the difficult separation that arose as a result of administrative and economic limitations. The informant, a street vendor who also takes care of her daughter, arrived in Spain with her two children in 2007, following her husband who was already living in Europe. However, her husband lost his job due to the economic crisis that affected particularly the immigrant population in Spain; and so they had to separate again. Fama's husband and two older children went to another part of Spain looking for work, while she stayed with her young daughter in the town wherein our study was conducted. Our participant dedicates whatever available time to street vending, so that she can contribute to the family budget not only in Spain both also in Senegal.

I have my girl; my husband is not here, I am alone with [her] [...] If I don't sell, I don't eat [...] I want to work, but there are no jobs [...] I have my family there too [...] And I have to sell something or work [...] to help them (Fama, Mouridiyya, personal communication, February 21, 2013).

However, Fama's family is not only fragmented as a result of internal mobility in Spain; before leaving Senegal, she gave birth to a son who had to stay in the country of origin. Fama's husband has not yet met his son.

But he [my child] has no papers, so he can't come. And if my husband works we can meet and regroup the family, but for now, he has no job [...] it is very difficult, but what can we do? (Fama, Mouridiyya, personal communication, February 21, 2013).

Obstacles to mobility limit the possibility of transiting between the two countries for the majority of Senegalese migrants. However, this does not mean that there are no families dispersed in different destination countries that still remain connected despite not being able to see each other in person. The emergence of transnational families with multiple focuses is reflected in their participation in practices across borders that unite Senegal not only with Spain but also with those other countries.

I am from a family where almost everyone is migrants. We are thirteen, nine living in Europe [...] four living in Senegal (Mohammed, Mouridiyya, Baye Fall, personal communication, October 30, 2013).

My father is in England, my aunt is in Murcia; my cousins and my aunts are in Italy; I also have an aunt who lives in Denmark [...] and another one living in France (Medun, Tijaniyya, personal communication, August 5, 2013).

The extent to which transnational networks can affect the lives of migrants can be illustrated with the case of Rokhaya. This informant is a 35-year-old housewife. Daily contacts with family and friends, settled in different parts of the world, became crucial relationships in their daily lives.

I have a brother [...] who is in Italy [...] I have an uncle who is in America, I have a cousin who lives in Palma de Mallorca [...] Before visiting Senegal this year, he will come here [...] I have a girl friend who is in La Coruña [...] Another one who is working lives in San Sebastian, Basque Country [...] Every Saturday we all talk [...] almost three or even five hours over the cellphone (Rokhaya, personal communication, March 22, 2013).

At the same time, Rokhaya is in constant connection with the daily life of her family in Senegal:

To Senegal... I called my father and my little sister yesterday [...] that is why I do not want to go out, I like soap operas... talking on Skype [...] My little sister [...] has Skype [...] We are always talking “What are you doing? What are you cooking? What music you’re playing? What are you doing today?” (Rokhaya, personal communication, March 22, 2013).

Obstacles in undertaking regular trips to Senegal do not diminish the predominant desire to return. The vast majority of participants repeatedly express the strength of the ties that bind them to Senegal despite the passing of the years.

This is not my country, nor my land. All my family is over there, all my friends. I don’t know anyone who would like to stay here. Here I’m just looking for a better life (Sadio, interview notes, field diary, July 28, 2008).¹¹

As in the case of continuous mobility between destination and origin countries, the possibility of returning is also practically exclusive to those who enjoy a stable economic and legal situation. Returning is dependent on the achievement of objectives such as the accumulation of sufficient resources to starting a business or buying a house in Senegal. The fulfillment of these types of goals is perceived as necessary to consider a migration project successful, which is linked to the social renown that the migrant would enjoy upon

¹¹We could not always get approval to record interview audio. In these cases notes were taken during the course of the interaction. Notes were made in an interview format, without indirect style, and they are reproduced here as such.

returning. Returning with “empty hands” constitutes into a powerful deterrent, not only because of dissatisfaction with material objectives but also because of social pressure.

If I return to my country, it won't be because I want to [...] if the police takes me [...] everyone will know that it's the police taking me [...] If I return voluntarily, people will say “why are you here? [...]” But they don't know I'm suffering here [...] It's the neighborhood people [...] If you are on the streets, you hear everything: “Oh [...] he has nothing after five years without bringing any money” (Assen, Mouridiyya, non-practicing, personal communication, March 22, 2013).

It is highly revealing that both visiting the country of origin and returning to Spain are perceived by many participants as something that characterizes the Senegalese. Although only a few can enjoy transnational mobility, this is something that most migrants aspire to. The fact that there are people who managed to succeed in areas that allow them to move between the origin and destination countries, or return definitively, becomes an stimulus for other migrants to incorporate this ideal in their imaginary about success abroad.

Border protection of the so-called “Fortress Europe” implies difficulties for the transit of people, which clashes against the return and mobility aspirations of the population analyzed. Migration policies have very tangible consequences in the lives of migrants, both in terms of their border crossing strategies and in their settlement in Europe; they affect the possibilities of leaving and entering the country of destination and, therefore, their relations with the country of origin; at the same time, they are accompanied by the feeling that the existing migration policies are unfair:

Coming here is not easy, because some do not get a visa. Now, if you want to go to Senegal the door is open. You can go wherever you want. But to come here, we have to ask for a visa [...] the ambassador can ask you for all the papers. So you bring all the papers. The ambassador says “No [...] because I don't want to give it to you.” The European ambassadors in Africa get all their money from Africa, from the pockets of the Africans, because they know many want to come here (Ali, Tijaniyya, personal communication, March 8, 2013).

Migrants denounce the criminalization of the efforts they make in “looking for a better life.” The difficulties faced can be exemplified with the history of Mustafa, who arrived in Spain as a teenager in 2006. Since then, he has had multiple jobs, but despite the passing years, he has not been able to regularize his situation.

Many people are taken to jail because of their looks, without doing anything. For example [...] I was taken to jail for 15 months [...] I didn't hurt anyone [...] I just got here and of course I don't have papers or anything [...] Here in Spain, it's hard, they don't quite understand immigration [...] For example [...] on Monday I'm stopped by the civil guard [...] and they ask me if I have any paper. I don't have any papers

[...] They tell me “a rabbit has better legal status than you here” [...] It is not lack of understanding of immigration, it is disrespect (Mustafá, Mouridiyya, Baye Fall, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

Mustafa, like so many other migrants, cannot visit or return to Senegal. Legal obstacles prevent the involvement in the country of origin to which multiple participants aspire. However, the criminalization of mobility does not mean losing of ties with Senegal. As has been shown in the previous pages, the frequency of contact with the society of origin, as well as the importance attributed to it, means that despite the involuntary immobility that mostly characterizes the Senegalese population analyzed in our research, a strong involvement in their original society still persists.

CONCLUSION

The debate on transnationalism has been a constant in academia for more than two decades. The existing defining ambiguities result in a need for conceptually reflecting on the different phenomena behind this term. Senegalese migrants, so frequently analyzed as a transnational community, do keep, in the case of Villanueva, links across borders in a particular way.

Economic and administrative obstacles influence the fact that, despite the predominant desire to remain closely connected with the country of origin, it is very difficult for most migrants to travel to Senegal. However, the existence of social actors intensely involved in transnational mobility, such as religious leaders and the well-settled minority of migrants in the destination country, makes the aspiration to this type of life a constant in the life plans of the rest. The strength of ties with the home society is also reflected in the intensity of contact through remote communication means.

Religious institutions play a crucial role in strengthening links with the home country. The visits of religious leaders, as well as participating in large annual celebrations, which gather the Senegalese population regardless of specific religious affiliations, reinforce the connection with Senegal. In this way, religious institutions contribute to reaffirming the ties uniting migrants otherwise dispersed throughout the world and promoting good-standing relations with the host society and its local authorities.

The case analyzed demonstrates that despite the limited opportunities for transnational mobility and, consequently, for full participation in the life of Senegal, migrants can remain strongly connected with their society of origin. To dispense with the concept of transnationalism would make no justice to the intensity of the connections with Senegal and how relevant their role is in the daily life and future plans of the population analyzed. The concept of localized transnationalism proposed in this study allows us to keep track of the relevance these ties hold, showing likewise their coexistence with involuntary immobility. The concept formulation itself seeks to express the paradox of mobility

aspirations clashing against structural limitations for human transit. Its use will allow us to move forward in the conceptual debate regarding the multiplicity of expressions of transnational life.

Translator: Fernando Llanas

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