

Trinity University

Digital Commons @ Trinity

Sociology and Anthropology Honors Theses

Sociology and Anthropology Department

5-2023

Returning for a Better Life: The Habitus of Temporary Senegalese Male Migrants

Sophia Margaret Patterson

Trinity University, sophiampatterson1@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/socanthro_honors

Recommended Citation

Patterson, Sophia Margaret, "Returning for a Better Life: The Habitus of Temporary Senegalese Male Migrants" (2023). *Sociology and Anthropology Honors Theses*. 20.

https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/socanthro_honors/20

This Thesis open access is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology and Anthropology Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology and Anthropology Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

**Returning for a Better Life:
The Habitus of Temporary Senegalese Male Migrants**

Sophia Patterson

A DEPARTMENT HONORS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY AT TRINITY UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION WITH
DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

DATE: April 14, 2023

Tahir Naqvi
THESIS ADVISOR

Jennifer Mathews
DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Jennifer Henderson, AVPAA

Student Agreement

I grant Trinity University (“Institution”), my academic department (“Department”), and the Texas Digital Library (“TDL”) the non-exclusive rights to copy, display, perform, distribute and publish the content I submit to this repository (hereafter called “Work”) and to make the Work available in any format in perpetuity as part of a TDL, digital preservation program, Institution or Department repository communication or distribution effort.

I understand that once the Work is submitted, a bibliographic citation to the Work can remain visible in perpetuity, even if the Work is updated or removed.

I understand that the Work's copyright owner(s) will continue to own copyright outside these non-exclusive granted rights.

I warrant that:

- 1) I am the copyright owner of the Work, or
- 2) I am one of the copyright owners and have permission from the other owners to submit the Work, or
- 3) My Institution or Department is the copyright owner and I have permission to submit the Work, or
- 4) Another party is the copyright owner and I have permission to submit the Work.

Based on this, I further warrant to my knowledge:

- 1) The Work does not infringe any copyright, patent, or trade secrets of any third party,
- 2) The Work does not contain any libelous matter, nor invade the privacy of any person or third party, and
- 3) That no right in the Work has been sold, mortgaged, or otherwise disposed of, and is free from all claims.

I agree to hold TDL, DPN, Institution, Department, and their agents harmless for any liability arising from any breach of the above warranties or any claim of intellectual property infringement arising from the exercise of these non-exclusive granted rights.”

I choose the following option for sharing my thesis (required):

Open Access (full-text discoverable via search engines)

Restricted to campus viewing only (allow access only on the Trinity University campus via digitalcommons.trinity.edu)

I choose to append the following [Creative Commons license](#) (optional):

Introduction

While Senegal was once an established destination country for regional economic migrants, economic crisis in the 1970s increased Senegalese emigration, and today many Senegalese—particularly Senegalese men—migrate to Libya, Mauritania, and France, Italy, and Spain in search of work opportunities.¹ In Senegal, international labor migration is a powerful social and economic force, with one in ten Senegalese households having a member living abroad and half of all Senegalese having a relative living abroad.² Senegalese migrants work a variety of jobs, including in construction, agriculture, and trade. In 2020, 9.4 percent of Senegal’s GDP, \$2.3 billion, came from remittances from Senegalese working abroad. Senegal receives the fourth largest amount of remittances in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the ninth largest by share of GDP (World Bank Group 2020).³ While many Senegalese migrate to neighboring West African countries or within Senegal, many others migrate to Europe and, increasingly since the 1900s, to the United States. Most of this intercontinental migration is temporary, with migrants spending several years abroad before returning home permanently or engaging in repeated smaller migration projects. While Senegalese women do increasingly migrate internationally, the vast majority of Senegalese international migrants—especially temporary labor migrants—are still men.

While it is certainly an essential component of the conversation surrounding Senegalese migration, this thesis does not explicitly focus on the European migration crisis or on

¹ CIA, “Senegal,” in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, February 27, 2023), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/senegal/#people-and-society>.

² Dinah Hannaford, *Marriage Without Borders : Transnational Spouses in Neoliberal Senegal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 2017), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16t6kvm>.

³ World Bank Group, “Phase II: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens.” *Migration and Development Brief* 33, 2020.

“clandestine migration.” Rather, my research focuses on labor migration to Western countries by working and middle class Senegalese men. These are not undocumented migrants (*clandestins*) like those who attempt to reach North Africa or Europe by boat. Rather, they usually travel to Europe legally and then overstay their visas and become undocumented.

In this thesis, I study the narratives and practices which maintain this temporary migration regime. I consider how temporary migration functions not as an individual endeavor, but rather as a family and community project which provides its participants—migrants and others—with cultural capital, prestige, and expectations for what constitutes successful masculine migration. I consider how this family and community project carries a series of expectations which we can understand in relation to gendered social expectations and norms in Senegal. In doing so, I examine how community attitudes and family ties shape the masculine Senegalese migration experience as temporary and orient it toward Senegal.

Contrary to narratives about a new “wave” of African migration to Europe, migration has been a normal part of life in many parts of Africa, including Senegal, since before European colonization.⁴ Throughout West Africa, migration has long served as a rite of passage and marker of adulthood for young men, particularly in rural areas. The words for migrants in several West African languages index both the dangers of migration and the honor migrants gain upon return should they have the courage to successfully complete their journeys and return with material goods. The Soninke people of Mali and parts of Eastern Senegal refer to migrants as *gouniké*, “men of the vast wilderness.” Other West African ethnic groups use language which

⁴ Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy, “Introduction: African Patterns of Migration in a Global Era: New Perspectives,” in *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013), 1-16.

refers to migration as facing a rival or taking on a challenge.⁵ These understandings of migration underscore migration's continuing significance in West Africa through colonialism, independence, and globalization. In this thesis, I consider how established understandings of male migration contribute to Senegalese migrants' habitus upon arriving in the United States or Europe. I also examine how this habitus positions return as the goal of successful migration projects, both stemming from expectations about the rewards of migration and creating expectations of wealth and success for migrants.

This thesis is broken into three chapters. In Chapter 1, I discuss the history of migration in Senegal as well as the Senegalese cultural imaginary of male migration. I also explore the literature on transnational family forms and life course approaches to migration in order to expand on my theoretical framing for this thesis. In Chapter 2, I examine how Senegalese and French-Senegalese works of literature and film have engaged with the migratory experience, particularly in response to the European migration crisis. In doing so, I attempt to both analyze and qualify some of the tropes of Senegalese migration. In Chapter 3, I draw from interviews to both expand on my discussion of the cultural imaginary of migration and analyze Senegalese male migrants' habitus.

Methodology

Initially, this research focused on Senegalese male migrants in the United States. I intended to conduct interviews with members of the Senegalese community in Houston and hoped to reach these individuals through the Senegalese Association of Houston, which has been

⁵ Isaie Dougnon, "Migration as Coping with Risk and State Barriers: Malian Migrants' Conception of Being Far from Home," in *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 40.

-serving the city’s Senegalese community since 1997. The association hosts semi-regular events in addition to connecting community members with legal and immigration services and information about local restaurants and international shipping.⁶ According to the association’s president, Mr. Fall, most Senegalese in Houston are students who either return home upon completing their education or remain to pursue careers in the United States. In addition to this significant student population, many Senegalese also come to Houston to work for varying periods of time, with some returning home once or twice a year and others remaining in the United States for up to a decade. Most of these migrants—students and labor migrants—are men. Mr. Fall noted that it is much easier to migrate with family to communities in the East Coast, e.g., New York City, which have larger and more established Senegalese populations. Houston can thus be understood as a “new destination” city for Senegalese migration, as I discuss briefly in Chapter 1. While this community certainly included the type of Senegalese migrants I hoped to interview for this thesis—men migrating temporarily, largely for work—I struggled to find willing participants and was ultimately forced to look for informants elsewhere.

Following my challenges finding informants in Houston, I decided to widen the scope of my project to examine not only Senegalese migrants in the United States, but also migrants in Europe. I also decided to include both current migrants and men who had previously migrated and have since returned home, which ultimately allowed me to better examine how migration affects men’s status and role in their communities upon return, i.e., the “rewards” of migration. I recruited informants in several ways. I reached out to my former host mother from Dakar, as well as a man whose family I stayed with during a trip to the Casamance as part of my study abroad program in Senegal. I also contacted several of the staff and instructors from my program and

⁶“About Us – SeneHouston,” accessed March 6, 2023, <https://senehouston.org/about-us/>.

Dr. Ashley Fox, professor of Public Policy and International Affairs at the State University of New York at Albany, who were able to put me in contact with potential informants. Ultimately, I was able to interview three informants, one who was abroad from the mid-1980s to early 2000s, one who splits his time between Senegal and Europe, and one whose family recently joined him in Europe.

My interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were conducted over WhatsApp. I conducted one interview in English and the other two in French. I took field notes during all interviews and also recorded them, which was particularly helpful for the French interviews. As I will discuss more in the conclusion of this thesis, my language abilities were somewhat of a limiting factor on the depth I was able to achieve in the French interviews. The interviews were loosely structured into four sections: general background, pre-migration, experiences abroad, and experiences upon return. Each section contained three to seven questions, although I did not ask all these questions in every interview. While my informants have “returned” to various degrees—i.e., permanently vs. when visiting—I asked all of them the questions about their experiences upon return.

Chapter 1

The History of Migration in Senegal

Studying Senegalese male migration today requires an understanding of how Senegalese migration practices have shifted during and since colonization. French colonization encouraged migration in Senegal and throughout West Africa in ways which both added to and altered existing understandings of migration. The French colonial model, which emphasized centralization of power in the Four Communes and designated Dakar as the capital of French West Africa, encouraged migration to specific urban centers and away from areas which received less colonial investment. Economic isolation created by colonial policy and rural location in North and East Senegal further shaped cultures of migration, specifically toward Dakar, in rural areas with longstanding migration traditions.⁷ The introduction and promotion of peanuts as a cash crop, combined with colonial taxes, also drove many Senegalese and residents of neighboring countries to migrate seasonally to peanut plantations to earn wages and buy commercial goods.⁸ These migrant workers, called *navetanes*, were part of a growing trend toward migrant labor in colonial Senegal.⁹ Following World War II, France began recruiting temporary Senegalese workers for several industries. Like the seasonal labor migration within Senegal, this migration was generally circular and brief, and men generally migrated in order to earn money for their home communities and families.¹⁰

⁷ Cris Beauchemin et al., “From Senegal and Back (1975–2008): Migration Trends and Routes of Migrants in Times of Restrictions,” in *Migration Between Africa and Europe*, ed. Cris Beauchemin (New York City: Springer Cham, 2018), 365.

⁸ George E. Brooks, “Peanuts and Colonialism: Consequences of the Commercialization of Peanuts in West Africa, 1830-70,” *The Journal of African History* 16, no. 1 (1975).

⁹ Peter Mark, “Urban Migration, Cash Cropping, and Calamity: The Spread of Islam among the Diola of Boulouf (Senegal), 1900-1940,” *African Studies Review* 21, no. 2 (1978): 7.

¹⁰ Beauchemin et al., “From Senegal and Back (1975-2008),” 365.

While Senegalese have always migrated domestically and to neighboring countries—indeed, these forms of migration are still the largest forms of migration throughout Sub-Saharan Africa—economic and social changes in Senegal post-independence increasingly drove Senegalese to migrate outside Africa.¹¹ France continued to recruit Senegalese migrant workers post-independence; this policy, combined with the fact that Senegalese migrants were exempt from requirements for residence permits and tourist visas until 1974, made France the primary Senegalese migration destination into the 1970s. In the mid-late 1970s, France implemented increasingly restrictive immigration policies—which effectively signaled the end of circular labor migration—in addition to ending policies which had previously facilitated return migration, family reunification, and study in France.¹² The following decades brought numerous challenges for Senegal, including worsening drought and economic uncertainty. Shrinking public budgets limited available work in the previously-flourishing public sector, leading many men who might otherwise have worked government jobs to seek opportunities elsewhere.¹³ Confronted with restrictive French immigration policies, many Senegalese sought opportunities in neighboring countries and in Italy and Spain, which quickly became top destinations for Senegalese migrants even as they too began to adopt restrictive policies.¹⁴ Senegalese also opted to migrate to the United States, particularly after the 1990 green card lottery made more permanent resident visas available for people from under-represented countries.¹⁵

It is thus important to note that, while out-migration rates have remained relatively stable in Senegal in the past few decades, the origins and destinations of these migrants are shifting.

¹¹ Kane and Leedy, “Introduction: African Patterns of Migration in a Global Era: New Perspectives,” 1-16.

¹² Beauchemin et al., “From Senegal and Back (1975-2008),” 365.

¹³ Caroline Melly, “Titanic Tales of Missing Men: Reconfigurations of National Identity and Gendered Presence in Dakar, Senegal,” *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 2 (2011): 366.

¹⁴ Beauchemin et al., “From Senegal and Back (1975-2008),” 366.

¹⁵ Beauchemin et al., 375.

Regions with traditionally high rates of migration, such as the Senegal River valley, have experienced decreased migration. Meanwhile, areas which have traditionally been—and still are—destinations for domestic and regional migrants, like Dakar, are seeing rising rates of out-migration. These changing regional dynamics of Senegalese migration illustrate how urban and economic growth outside Dakar have created new opportunities in previously isolated communities. At the same time, Dakar’s complex position as both a beacon of opportunity for young Senegalese and a site of disappointment and frustration for young people demonstrates how migration decisions and aspirations are both practical and idealized.

In addition to coming from new regions of Senegal, Senegalese migrants increasingly also choose new destinations; a lower percentage live in West Africa, while the percentage of Senegalese migrants in North America has doubled.¹⁶ Since the 1990s, growing immigrant dispersion within the United States has created new destinations for immigrant communities which were formerly concentrated in a small number of states and gateway cities.¹⁷ Immigrants to the United States now increasingly move to cities with less established ethnic communities, both due to growing demand for labor, including specific forms of skilled labor, in these new destinations and the excess of workers in traditional migration destinations.¹⁸ For Senegalese migrants, their migration destinations may depend on why and with whom they migrate; as the president of the Senegalese Association of Houston discussed, Senegalese migrants traveling with their families still often choose established destinations on the East Coast, while Houston is a more attractive choice for younger migrants and students.

¹⁶ Beauchemin et al., 367.

¹⁷ Chenoa A. Flippen and Dylan Farrell-Bryan, “New Destinations and the Changing Geography of Immigrant Incorporation,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (July 31, 2021): 480.

¹⁸ Flippen and Farrell-Bryan, 482-3.

Despite these geographic changes, migration has maintained its status as a rite of passage and source of opportunity for Senegalese men, even though the parameters of this journey and the potential rewards have shifted. Migration's continued power is evidenced by the fact that many more Senegalese consider migration than actually migrate; research estimates that, in 2008, one third of Senegalese had taken steps toward migration, such as requesting documents, participating in green card lotteries, or saving travel funds. In the 1970s, only one in ten Senegalese had taken similar steps.¹⁹ Migration is thus clearly a salient aspect of Senegalese culture, even for those who are never able to fulfill their migration aspirations.

Since Senegal's independence, the available legal routes for international migration have shifted. The end of guest worker programs in France, combined with a shift toward migrating to non-Francophone countries, have necessitated new networks and paths for migrants. Post-independence, much Senegalese migration, and West African migration more broadly, has been facilitated by kinship and trade networks. The Hausa and Songhay people—from present day Nigeria and Niger/Mali, respectively—have worked through trade networks in which established elder traders in West Africa, referred to as “fathers,” sponsor trade “children” in New York, providing them with capital, visas, and tickets. These networks facilitate migration and instill migrants with both resources and obligations toward their patrons.²⁰ Such trade networks point to the importance of social capital in the migration process. Historically and today, Senegalese migrants make use of—and cannot do without—family and community connections to get legal documents, find jobs, and choose migration routes and destinations.

¹⁹ Beauchemin et al., 384.

²⁰ Paul Stoller, *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 42-44.

Undoubtedly, the most important—and the most studied—Senegalese trade networks in many countries are those of the Murid Muslim Brotherhood, which itself played a large role in the expansion of Senegalese migration beyond France and neighboring countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, Murid clergy established contraband circuits between Touba and the Gambia; the Senegalese government, which relied heavily on the Murid for its authority, mostly turned a blind eye to these activities. Using assets from the peanut trade, Murid businessmen began working in urban real estate and trade, including international trade, in the late 1970s. The mid-1990s devaluation of the CFA further cemented Murid trade dominance, as these traders had access to United States dollars and were thus somewhat cushioned from the effects of the devaluation. Increasing trade liberalization and decentralization of the Senegalese state in the late 1990s further enabled Murid trade networks to flourish.²¹ Before 1990, most African traders in New York were Senegalese who were backed by Murid networks.²² The Murid model has been particularly successful and has permitted many individuals without family connections to migrate because traders are sponsored by a Murid Cheikh, not just by family who might not be able to support the costs of migration alone.²³ While Murid trade networks are extensive and played an influential role in facilitating Senegalese international migration more broadly, they are also heavily represented in the literature, often at the expense of the other networks and connections which facilitate Senegalese international migration. While I do not focus specifically on the Murid in this paper, their outsize influence on Senegalese migration and Senegalese

²¹ Beth Buggenhagen, “Domestic Object(ion)s: The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Politics of Marriage Payments, Love, and State Privatization,” in *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age*, ed. Brad Weiss (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004): 30.

²² Stoller, *Money Has No Smell*, 19.

²³ Buggenhagen, “Domestic Object(ion)s,” 26.

presence in Western countries makes understanding Murid-sponsored migration an essential component of understanding Senegalese migration as a whole.

The Senegalese Cultural Imaginary of Male Migration

While Senegalese migrations patterns have shifted greatly, the Senegalese cultural imaginary of migration has remained relatively consistent throughout these changes. Migration has retained much of its original significance as a form of pilgrimage and rite of passage for young men, even as these men increasingly come from urban, not rural, areas and look to new international migration destinations. In West Africa, migration has historically been understood to have risks, and these risks make the experience worthwhile. Migrants' courage—their willingness to face the risks of migration—is what brings them and their families honor.²⁴ In addition to the honor of having successfully completed this rite of passage, migrants can also expect material rewards for their journeys. Historically and today, migration brings material goods; just as migrants in the 19th century returned to their villages with wealth and otherwise inaccessible resources and products, migrants today send home remittances, build houses in their home communities, and return with gifts for family and friends. Risk and reward are intimately linked in Senegalese understandings of migration; migrants only receive the benefits of migration in their community when they overcome dangers and return with the fruits of their journey.²⁵ Thus, migrants' rewards are further valued because of the risks required to achieve them.

²⁴ Dougnon, "Migration as Coping with Risk and State Barriers: Malian Migrants' Conception of Being Far from Home," in *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives*, eds. Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 45.

²⁵ Dougnon, 46-49.

Even with this knowledge of the history and cultural imaginary of migration, it is perhaps difficult to understand why young men would migrate and face the extensive investments required and the growing dangers of clandestine migration. Making explicit the often unspoken or implied role of religion in Senegalese migration decisions makes it clearer why young men are willing to take such risks, regardless of the promised rewards. As Bredeloup discusses in her study of West African migrants, we can also understand migration as a mystic journey in addition to as a pilgrimage and rite of passage; migrants' hopes for successful migration are intimately connected to their belief in God and confidence that he will protect them through danger. Faith allows migrants to both explain their luck in migration and endure challenges.²⁶ But more importantly for our consideration of why young men would take such risks, faith—in the case of Senegal, usually Islam—instills young men with a belief in destiny which gives young men the confidence to take risks in migration. Senegalese migrants understand migration success and failure as resting in God's hands; if they are meant to succeed, God will help them succeed. In her study of prospective clandestine migrants, Melly quotes one young man who, while describing a harrowing pirogue voyage, stated: "But God is great. If I was going to die, I was going to die."²⁷ This confidence in God and his destiny for migrants gives migrants confidence in their own journeys, and it illustrates what—in addition to the promise of rewards—encourages young men to take the risk of migrating.

Senegalese understandings of migration as a source of status and opportunity have remained consistent during, and even been bolstered by, political and economic shifts in the country. As a practice thought to bring men resources, opportunity, and honor, understandings of

²⁶ Sylvie Bredeloup, "The Migratory Adventure as a Moral Experience," in *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, eds. Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 140-41.

²⁷ Melly, "Titanic Tales of Missing Men," 369.

migration have necessarily operated in tandem with attitudes about successful masculine adulthood in Senegal. This connection between migration and successful manhood became clear in the 1980s, as Senegalese men looked for alternate paths to success in the face of financial crisis. Before the 1980s, educated Senegalese men, especially those living in Dakar, could look to the public sector for jobs which would enable them to achieve social and financial success. However, as public budgets shrank, this ideal of the salaried man became increasingly unachievable, leading men to search for other forms of post-colonial success.²⁸ Senegalese men turned to migration as a gendered source of social capital and as a way to afford rites of passage—such as marriage and buying a home—which mark passage into adulthood. Just as the salaried man had once been the epitome of post-colonial success, the migrant, a “risk-taking entrepreneur who sought an alternative future,” now came to represent successful Senegalese masculine adulthood.²⁹ Thus, at the same time that this understanding of migration valorizes migrants as a certain kind of successful man, it also valorized migration itself as a path to opportunity which promises great rewards to those willing to take risks.

These understandings of migrants—as pilgrims, as adventurers, as risk-takers—remain salient today. For many Senegalese men, migration appears to be the best avenue to the masculine adulthood, social presence, and wealth they struggle to find in Senegal.³⁰ While Senegalese women migrate too, male migration is uniquely driven by a desire for the aspects of masculine social adulthood which have become increasingly inaccessible for young Senegalese men: home ownership, marriage, and starting a family. In her study of prospective Senegalese migrants, Melly describes a “state of restless anxiety and fervent anticipation about the future,”

²⁸ Melly, 366.

²⁹ Melly, 363.

³⁰ Melly, 363.

fueled by worries about the dangers of migration, but also young men's frustrations with their inability to find meaningful economic opportunities in Dakar.³¹ We might thus describe contemporary Senegalese male migration as stemming from young men's stagnation—perceived and real—in their journeys to adulthood. These feelings of stagnation and frustration explain why young men continue to migrate abroad, regardless of the risk involved.

Notably, young men's stagnation stems not only from a lack of jobs—or a system of employment which relies heavily on personal connections—but also from a lack of opportunities which young men feel are accessible and appropriately dignified. As Michael Ralph notes in his article “Killing Time,” which examines the culture surrounding *ataya*, a popular tea in Senegal, young men's perceived laziness—coupled with young men's high unemployment rates—feeds the assumption that young men, particularly urban young men, are unable and unwilling to work.³² The men that Ralph interviewed spent hours a day drinking and making *ataya*, and described their time as having “no value,” both because they had so much of it and because they felt that there were no opportunities for them to do something more valuable with their time; even going back to school or acquiring useful skills for employment felt futile for these young men, whose stagnation stemmed not only from their own challenges but also from a more widespread perception among Senegalese youth that the country—and its government—have not opportunities for them.³³

Even for young men who try to work, a lack of class-appropriate opportunities means that their work in Senegal will never be a long-term solution to their economic challenges. In his study of young men in Pikine, a major city just outside Dakar, Prothmann notes that many young

³¹ Melly, 365.

³² Michael Ralph, “Killing Time,” *Social Text* 26, no. 4 [97] (2008 Winter 2008): 1.

³³ Ralph, 13-14.

men considering migration do in fact have employment options at home, but feel that these jobs—most of which are part of the informal economy—are below them and want to avoid the shame of being seen in such occupations. When these men do work informal jobs, they do so temporarily and attempt to hide their work from family and peers.³⁴ It is important to note that young men’s aversion to informal work is also practical, as much informal work is inconsistent and lacks the job security required to plan for the future. For young men with limited formal opportunities, informal work is a sort of double bind; it is necessary to work to have the financial resources required to be a respected social adult, but informal work is both unstable and not considered worthy of established adults. Migration is thus not just about accessing wealth, but rather is about accessing wealth in a way appropriate for one’s social class.

Hernández-Carretero’s analysis of hope and uncertainty in Senegalese migration to Europe further illustrates how migrants’ class sensibilities, coupled with Senegalese norms of reciprocity and generosity—e.g., gift giving and hospitality—push young men abroad to find solutions to their challenges at home. Hernández-Carretero posits that migration serves as a “spatial fix to a temporal problem,” as migrating allows young men to accelerate their development into adulthood in Senegal.³⁵ Successful migrants thus “return ahead,” since migrating lets them skip forward to a point where they are financially stable, established adults.³⁶ Crucially, this skipping forward does not necessarily mean that migration is quick, or that it guarantees success. Rather, what is significant is that migrating allows men to achieve distance from their families and communities, distance which lets them do whatever they must to

³⁴ Sebastian Prothmann, “Migration, Masculinity and Social Class: Insights from Pikine, Senegal,” *International Migration* 56, no. 4 (2018): 99-100.

³⁵ María Hernández-Carretero, “Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain: Taking Chances on Emigration but not Upon Return,” in *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, eds. Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 117.

³⁶ Hernández-Carretero, “Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain, 121.

succeed—e.g., work unrespectable jobs—which they might avoid doing at home for fear of undermining their status.³⁷ Further, because wages are higher in Europe and the United States than in Senegal, migration allows men to earn more money—even while working unrespectable jobs—than they might ever be able to earn in Senegal. Migrating thus allows men to skip not the time and effort of achieving masculine social adulthood, but the challenge of slowly building this life in front of their communities; being in Europe does not shield young men from challenges, but it does let them maintain more status than they might be able to at home. Being away from family also enables young men to save money by protecting them from both obligations of reciprocity and some of the shame of failing to fulfill these obligations.³⁸

So far, I have examined the conditions and attitudes which lead young men to migrate and the rewards they expect, but not what they hope to find abroad beyond a general understanding of success. Crucially, the Senegalese cultural imaginary of migration not only positions migration destinations as places of risk and reward, but increasingly identifies these destinations—specifically Europe and other destinations in the Global North—as sites of hope and opportunity. Hernández-Carretero discusses such “spatial distribution of hope and uncertainty,” noting that individuals’ migration aspirations mirror how they assign hope unevenly across various countries or regions;³⁹ migration aspirations reflect a desire to travel to regions which migrants associate with greater hope for their futures. For young Senegalese men in particular, Europe promises to let them take on “responsibility” (*am taxaway*, literally presence or assistance) and to do something (*realiser quelque chose, def dara*)—in other words,

³⁷ Prothmann, “Migration, Masculinity and Social Class,” 102.

³⁸ María Hernández-Carretero, “Renegotiating Obligations through Migration: Senegalese Transnationalism and the Quest for the Right Distance,” *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 41, no. 12 (October 2015): 2022; Prothmann, “Migration, Masculinity, and Social Class,” 99.

³⁹ Hernández-Carretero, “Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain,” 116.

to find rewarding work and to build their futures;⁴⁰ Europe is *kaw* (on top), a term associated with social climbing which is often applied to countries in the Global North and indexes “a bundle of positive characteristics and [is] imagined to be better, more prosperous and deemed to match the expectations” of migrants.⁴¹ Migration thus allows young men to make up for their stagnation and lack of masculine success in Senegal by working hard and taking risks. Instead of dissuading migrants, the risks of migrating to the Global North make the journey more attractive, both because they promise greater rewards and because they imbue migration with an honor—and migrants with a dignity—that young men feel is inaccessible in their current situations. This spatial distribution of hope, I would argue, also means that Senegal and the Global North become associated not only with stagnation and opportunity, respectively, but also that migrants come to understand them as places for fundamentally different types of life, as I will discuss more in Chapter 3.

While this thesis does not focus on undocumented migration in particular, we cannot discuss Senegalese migration today without considering the European migration crisis. As I will discuss further in Chapter 2, the cultural imaginary of male migration in Senegal has increasingly been shaped by the European migration crisis in recent years, and Senegalese who attempt to migrate without papers, known as clandestine migrants, often dominate conversations about migration in Senegal, both in the country and abroad. European governments, who fear being “overrun” with these migrants, have organized anti-clandestine migration campaigns, while Senegalese families fear losing their sons to the journey to Europe. The European migration crisis affects all African migrants in Europe and increasingly justifies the heightened hostility migrants—both those with documents and those without—face while abroad.

⁴⁰ Prothmann, “Migration, Masculinity, and Social Class,” 101.

⁴¹ Prothmann, 102-103.

Neither European publicity campaigns nor community concern have succeeded in dissuading these potential migrants, called *candidats*, from boarding dangerous pirogues (long, narrow canoes) and attempting to make the journey to Europe. This continued migration despite the odds reveals how many Senegalese men feel that meaningful social adulthood is inaccessible at home. More importantly, however, it reveals the ongoing power of the image of the migrant as a hero, a leader in his community, and a man who can achieve meaningful social presence. Campaigns aimed at decreasing migration in Mali have failed because they present risk—a core part of traditional understandings of migration—as a reason not to migrate; for communities which have also understood migration as inherently dangerous and which have valorized it because of this, warnings about risk are not always effective.⁴² Caroline Melly similarly argues that the dangers of clandestine migration have not dissuaded *candidats* precisely because, even when migrants are lost at sea or missing, they are present in social life and discourse as adventurers, entrepreneurs, and family men.⁴³ Thus, even when these men fail, they are valorized, reinforcing the honor associated with migration even for those who lose their lives in search of this honor.

Not all migrants are clandestine migrants in the sense discussed above. However, this understanding of the risks—and the associated rewards—of migration applies to Senegalese migrants who take less dangerous paths as well. Migration is a difficult process requiring significant savings and support from family and community for all Senegalese. But for all Senegalese, migration also has the potential to carry enormous financial, familial, and social rewards.

⁴² Dougnon, “Migration as Coping with Risk and State Barriers,” 36.

⁴³ Melly, 363.

Habitus and Life Course Approaches to Senegalese Migration

In her study of Ghanaian migrants and transnational families, Cati Coe examines how families adapt existing practices to negotiate long-term separation. Arguing that these adapted family practices form a repertoire for navigating separation and distance, Coe considers how this repertoire serves as a cultural resource and framework for mobilizing resources.⁴⁴ I adopt a similar framework in this paper, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus to consider how Senegalese migration to the United States operates as a historical and social practice with embedded obligations, expectations, and rewards. While Coe uses repertoire partially due to its openness to "revision, reshuffling, and reflection," I opt to examine Senegalese migration practices as a habitus because it allows for an examination of migration as a product of relations between norms, expectations, values, and behaviors;⁴⁵ while the habitus surrounding migration in Senegal creates a repertoire of potential actions for migrants, this repertoire is not the only salient aspect of Senegalese migration.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a system "of durable, transposable dispositions" allows us to consider migrants' practices as regulated practices of agency, making space for both a recognition of structural forces and established understandings of migration and an awareness of the particularity of individuals' migration projects.⁴⁶ Several scholars of migration have employed the concept of habitus to understand migration projects; Engbersen discusses a migratory habitus of "intentional unpredictability," characterized by a lack of definitive migration aspirations and open options, in his study of liquid migration in the European Union,

⁴⁴ Cati Coe, *The Scattered Family: Parenting, African Migrants and Global Inequality* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2013), 5.

⁴⁵ Coe, 16.

⁴⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

while Spener considers how Mexican migrants' gendered and class-specific habitus shapes their willingness to endure risk which crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.⁴⁷ Like these scholars, I employ habitus in order to understand migration as an individual project wrapped up in and shaped by larger social forces, expectations, and aspirations.

In this paper, I examine how the habitus of Senegalese male migrants positions return as the goal of successful migration projects, both stemming from expectations about the rewards of migration and creating expectations of wealth and success for migrants. This habitus thus interacts intimately with the cultural imaginary of male migration in Senegal, incorporating the established understanding of migration as a process of risk and reward while also upholding the notion of migration as directed toward home and the promised rewards of return.

Understanding Senegalese male migrants' habitus requires understanding how migration is about building a certain kind of life. Scholars examining migration and transnational families have considered how migration projects—and the family obligations they entail—differ based on migrants' ages and life stages. For young couples and unmarried migrants, migration often serves as a tool for family and marriage building. These migration projects are often savings related, creating different expectations of obligation to family at home than those for more established migrants. For these couples and adults “in the making,” migration is an investment, a way to generate income and gather the resources necessary to build a successful life at home.⁴⁸ In Senegal, migrating allows men to save money to get married or to build or buy a home,

⁴⁷ Godfried Engbersen, “Migration Transitions in an Era of Liquid Migration: Reflections on Fassmann and Reeger,” in *European Immigrations: Trends, Structures and Policy Implications*, ed. Marek Okólski (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 98-9; David Spener, “Passing Judgment: Coyotes in the Discourse of Clandestine Border-Crossing,” in *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2009), 226-7.

⁴⁸ Karin Wall and Claudio Bolzman, “Mapping the New Plurality of Transnational Families: A Life Course Perspective,” in *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, eds. Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 65-67.

important markers of successful masculine adulthood. For these migrants, migration is part of creating a successful, socially meaningful life; rather than interrupting migrants' life courses, migration is a necessary step in them. In a country which has long understood migration as a rite of passage for men, migrating abroad serves as another iteration of this rite. Not only does migration bring the material resources necessary to become a social adult, it also proves migrants' masculine adulthood and confers respect on return. The promises of migration mean that migrating is never just about earning money; rather, it is about achieving a certain kind of life.

At the same time that aspirations of masculine adulthood orient the migration experience toward an idealized future home, expectations at home also orient migrants toward Senegal even as they live and work abroad. Besides migrants' hopes for return, this orientation toward home is also a product of migrants' obligations to their families and home communities. As previously discussed, migration is an expensive and difficult process, usually requiring outside support. Migration also provides migrants with resources—or is understood to do so—which are inaccessible at home. Migrating thus creates expectations of mutual obligation and reciprocity; migrants must care for the family and community members who helped them in their journeys, especially when they have access to the perceived wealth of Western countries.⁴⁹ In their introduction to *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care*, Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla discuss how reciprocity and obligation are central to “doing family,” emphasizing the importance of caregiving as a form of social capital which maintains

⁴⁹ Tracey Reynolds and Elisabetta Zontini, “Care Circulation in Transnational Families: Social and Cultural Capitals in Italian and Caribbean Migrant Communities in Britain,” in *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, eds. Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 208.

transnational relationships.⁵⁰ These expectations of reciprocity are particularly pronounced in Senegal, where processes of creating mutual obligation—e.g., hospitality and gift giving—are long-established and where the Wolof value of *teranga*, “good hospitality,” means generous reciprocity is a cultural norm.⁵¹ Senegalese migrants are thus highly obligated to their communities, making reciprocity not an option, but rather an expectation for migrants.

These two aspects of contemporary Senegalese male migration—its orientation toward an idealized future life and its tie to migrants’ home communities—mean that Senegalese migration projects are necessarily directed toward return to Senegal. Notably, these two aspects of migration are intimately connected; returning home as a successful social adult allows men to share their wealth and care for their families and communities, which in turn reinforces their success as migrants and adult men. Returning home is the goal of migration, both because it brings migrants promised rewards and because it allows them to share these rewards, thus establishing social adulthood and fulfilling community expectations of reciprocity.

Understanding Senegalese migration as oriented toward Senegal allows us to understand how migrants engage with their home communities and their host countries and how they conceptualize their time abroad. Further, examining migration through the lens of return allows for a consideration of a wide range of migration experiences—including “successful” short-term migration and unintended long-term migration—as part of the same habitus, played out in different ways based on migrants’ resources, abilities, and luck.

⁵⁰ Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla, “Introduction: Transnational Family Caregiving Through the Lens of Circulation,” in *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, eds. Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merlan (New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 7.

⁵¹ Buggenhagen, “Domestic Object(ion)s,” 22.

Chapter 2

While this thesis does not focus explicitly on clandestine migration and the European migration crisis, it is impossible to ignore the increasingly outsize presence which they play in Senegalese understandings of migration and the successful migrant. In this section, I examine how Senegalese literature and film have grappled with the changing roles of migrants, with a specific focus on two works—*The Belly of the Atlantic* and *Atlantics*—and their implications for our understanding of clandestine migration. In doing so, I illustrate both how the Senegalese cultural imaginary of migration is shaped by new forms of migration and how it influences Senegalese understandings of these new migratory dynamics. At the same time, I hope to challenge some of the tropes used in these works and raise questions about how class and education shape Senegalese understandings of migration.

In her book *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media*, Mahriana Rofheart traces the development of Senegalese migration literature since the 1930s. The novels she discusses illustrate how the cultural imaginary of migration has shifted since Senegalese independence and highlight how the current European migration crisis both participates in a tradition of understanding migration as inherently dangerous and prompts a growing Senegalese anti-migration ethos. Pre-independence, Senegalese authors focused on the role of migration as both a path to opportunity and a source of cross-cultural conflict and confusion, emphasizing the importance of migrants—particularly those who migrated to France for their education—as cultural intermediaries.⁵² Cheikh Hamidou Kane, author of the 1961 novel *The Ambiguous Adventure*, highlighted how pressure from migrants' home communities—to succeed in Europe, to serve as community leaders, and, implicitly, to help their struggling

⁵² Mahriana Rofheart, *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media* (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 16-17.

communities with the returns of their migration—shaped the migration experiences of young men in the years leading up to Senegalese independence.⁵³

Following Senegalese independence, authors continued to examine migration, increasingly considering how new destinations and new kinds of migrants, namely women, fit into established understandings of migration. Aminata Sow Fall and Ken Bugul's novels highlight the hardships and violence of migration for Senegalese women and position return and reintegration into Senegalese communities as a solution to the alienation of living in Europe.⁵⁴ Notably, neither Kane, Sow, or Bugul present migration as explicitly positive, and their works define migration as a disappointing, often dangerous experience. It would be fair to categorize many works of 20th century Senegalese migration literature as warnings against the dangers of migration, a fact which complicates our understanding of the cultural imaginary of migration: while this cultural imaginary does include risk and danger, they have always been understood to be justified by the rewards of migration, and the novels of Kane, Bugul, and others do not justify the challenges their characters experience in Europe. While these authors' ostensibly anti-migration stances are certainly reflective of the real challenges which Senegalese migrants—including educated migrants such as the authors faced in Europe in the mid to late 20th century, they are also reflective of Kane, Sow, and Bugul's specific positions as educated Senegalese. All three authors were educated in Europe, and their works reached an audience of educated, upper-class Senegalese and French-Senegalese readers. This is not to say that the Senegalese general public would not agree with the messages of their works, but rather that it is unclear how much ordinary Senegalese—i.e., the people who are usually labor migrants—were engaging with these works.

⁵³ Rofheart, 15.

⁵⁴ Rofheart, 53-60.

While 20th century Senegalese migration literature highlighted migrants' experiences of alienation and explored how a variety of migrant groups—women, students, etc.—experienced life in Europe and adapted to life in Senegal upon returning home, more recent works have overwhelmingly focused on the European migration crisis and the plight of clandestine migrants. In doing so, they illustrate both a growing concern over the dangers of migration and the continued influence of narratives of risk and reward on migration decisions. Fatou Diome's semi-autobiographical 2003 novel, *The Belly of the Atlantic*, examines migration through a series of characters who successfully or unsuccessfully travel to Europe. Published while Diome was living in France, the novel primarily reached a French and French-Senegalese audience, and it is unclear how much the Senegalese general public engaged with it. Thus, like Kane, Sow, and Bugul's novels, we can examine *The Belly of the Atlantic* not necessarily as representative of Senegalese attitudes toward migration, but rather as representative of one part of the discourse surrounding migration: that of educated Senegalese.

The novel's protagonist, Salie—like Diome herself—is a young Senegalese woman living in France, but most of the novel focuses not on her experiences as a migrant, but on her home community of Niodior, a small island in Senegal, and on her conversations with her younger brother Madické, who dreams of making a name for himself playing soccer in France. Throughout the novel, Salie tries to dissuade Madické from coming to France, warning him that life in Europe is more challenging than he has been led to believe. Salie ultimately convinces Madické to stay in Niodior and start a business, though he is only able to do so because Salie helps him with money she made in France. This moment speaks to the novel's larger contradictions; Salie discourages Madické from migrating, but remains in France herself, leading Madické to believe she is lying or hiding something from him. As I will discuss in Chapter 3,

this dynamic—trying to dissuade a family member or friend from migrating while remain abroad oneself—is not uncommon and reveals how migrants can simultaneously know how unlikely they are to succeed in migration and become trapped abroad, forced to remain in Europe to maintain the living standards, financed by remittances, to which their families have become accustomed; even migrants who have had no success abroad may be unable or unwilling to return home empty handed and reluctant to throw away years of effort when another opportunity may not arise.⁵⁵ In *The Belly of the Atlantic*, Salie—who never fit in at home—does not deny that migrating changed her life for the better, but she fears that Madické will not share her luck.

The Belly of the Atlantic also features two other characters who serve to show the emptiness of migration success stories, furthering Diome’s argument against migration. Moussa, a young man who tried to make a career out of playing for a French soccer club, returns home penniless and is so ashamed he drowns himself in the Atlantic, while Barbès, a man who migrated to France and is now the richest man in the village, hides his “wretched existence” in France behind lies about a luxurious, easy life abroad.⁵⁶ Moussa’s drowning is a clear reference to the deaths of prospective migrants—*candidats*—who attempt to reach Europe or intermediary destinations such as the Canary Islands in dangerous pirogues. A search of the website of the Soleil, Senegal’s quasi-official newspaper, returns numerous articles about such *candidats à l’émigration* and cements the growing association in Senegal between young men, pirogues, and tragic deaths at sea.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ María Hernández-Carretero, “Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain,” 124, 126.

⁵⁶ Fatou Diome, *The Belly of the Atlantic*, trans. Lulu Norma and Ros Schwartz (Paris: Editions Anne Carrière, 2003), 59.

⁵⁷ “Emigration clandestine: 73 candidats portés disparus au large de la Libye,” *Le Soleil*, February 15, 2023, <https://lesoleil.sn/emigration-clandestine-73-candidats-portes-disparus-au-large-de-la-libye/>.

In the same way that Moussa represents the tragedy of failed migration, Barbès is an archetype of a successful migrant. Rich, with four fives, a wealth of stories about the wonders of Paris, and the only television in the village, Barbès exemplifies the success which many young men, including those in the novel, aspire to. Barbès is not only an implicit proponent of migration, but an explicit one, claiming that “anyone can be rich over there [in France]” and disparaging migrants who fail, saying that “you’d have to be a real idiot to come back from there poor.”⁵⁸ In reality, his bragging and criticisms—ones which echo the attitude among some Senegalese that migration is accessible to everyone and that those who don’t migrate are at fault—hide the reality of his struggles in France: poverty, hunger, and exploitation.⁵⁹ Just as Barbès is an archetype of a successful migrant, his experiences are also largely representative of Senegalese labor migrants’ challenges in Europe.

Barbès’ simplicity points to Diome’s intention in writing *The Belly of the Atlantic*—to dissuade migration—but it also minimizes the complexity of migrants’ experiences of return. Diome ultimately presents migration as an information issue: people continue to migrate because they’re misled by return migrants and by European media. But this archetype of the lying migrant doesn’t entirely hold up and isn’t consistent with what my informants shared about how they represented their experiences abroad to their families and communities. Research does show that male migrants sometimes misrepresent their success abroad in efforts to save face and that migrants’ wives may present an image of prosperity regardless of their husbands’ success, practicing the value of *sutura*, or discretion, by hiding their husbands’ potential problems.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Fatou Diome, 59.

⁵⁹ Ralph, “Killing Time,” 13.

⁶⁰ Dinah Hannaford, *Marriage Without Borders : Transnational Spouses in Neoliberal Senegal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 2017), 89; Beth Ann Buggenhagen, “Prophets and Profits: Gendered and Generational Visions of Wealth and Value in Senegalese Murid Households,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 4 (2001): 374-5.

However, this misrepresentation seems confined to migrants who are still struggling abroad, not those who have successfully returned. Attributing young Senegalese men's continued desire to migrate to misinformation—or lying—misrepresents the realities of messaging surrounding migration today. As I will examine in more detail in Chapter 3, it is true that many Senegalese continue to believe that migration and making money in Europe are easy, but this isn't necessarily because people lie about their challenges abroad. Senegal is saturated with messages discouraging clandestine migration and detailing its dangers, and it appears that migrants are willing and even incentivized to discuss their challenges abroad with their communities. This disconnect—between widespread beliefs that migration is easy and widespread messaging that it is not—points to the existence of a cultural imaginary which incorporates migrants' challenges into a logic of risk and reward, inscribing hope on the Global North in the process.

More recent Senegalese works of literature and film continue to engage with questions of clandestine migration, increasingly considering how migration impacts the communities which migrants leave behind. Fatou Diome's 2010 novel *Celles qui attendent* tells the stories of four women who navigate the challenges of having sons and husbands abroad without knowing anything about their loved one's situations.⁶¹ French-Senegalese filmmaker Mati Diop's 2019 film *Atlantics* similarly chronicles the experiences of young women left behind by prospective migrants. The film centers around a love story: Souleiman, a construction worker, is in love with Ada, but she is engaged to another, wealthier man. Frustrated after not being paid for months of work, Souleiman and a group of other young men decide to board a pirogue to Spain. After drowning at sea, the young men return as ghosts, possessing the bodies of their girlfriends and other members of the community to complete their unfinished business: to hold their employer

⁶¹ Fatou Diome, *Celles qui attendent*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2010).

accountable and, in Souleiman's case, to spend one last night with Ada.⁶² The film paints migration as tragic and as driven by frustration and a lack of opportunity, but also by hope; Souleiman's hopes for migration are intimately connected to his hopes for a future with Ada.

While tragic, the film is not a condemnation of clandestine migration à la *The Belly of the Atlantic*, but rather an effort "to represent—or do justice for—those who have disappeared" on their journeys to Europe.⁶³ Through the bodies of the women they left behind, the young men are given another chance—albeit brief—at life. The fact that the young men confront their exploitative employer speaks to the "reparative dynamic" in Diop's films; not only does Diop attempt to repair the image of African and the lost African migrant, but her character's actions can be interpreted as an attempt to repair the injustices which ultimately killed them.⁶⁴ By giving lost migrants physical presence, Diop makes literal their outsize presence in Senegal. As Melly argues, stories of failed pirogue voyages both draw attention to the crisis of clandestine migration and "paradoxically...enable social marginalized men...to achieve some degree of notoriety, respect, and success for themselves...through their public status as missing men."⁶⁵ "Missing men" such as those in *Atlantics* are increasingly an essential part of the cultural imaginary of migration and speak to the complexities of what it means to successfully migrate. Crucially, successful migration is not simply about reaching one's intended destination, even as this part of migration grows more dangerous. Rather, successful migration is about what migrants make of their time abroad. Missing migrants may be understood as more successful than those who return home as explicit failures; the uncertainty or migrants' missing status

⁶² *Atlantics*, directed by Mati Diop (2019; Netflix).

⁶³ Rosalind Galt, "The Spirits of African Cinema: Redemptive Aesthetics in Mati Diop's *Atlantics*," *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* 10 (2022): 97.

⁶⁴ Galt, 97.

⁶⁵ Melly, "Titanic Tales of Missing Men," 363.

means that they are not understood as having failed in the same way as migrants who return home empty-handed. Diop does not position Souleiman and the other young men as successes, but also does not position them as failures. Rather, she presents them as a form of hero, able to finally repair the injustices they and other young Senegalese men have faced. Diop's use of the supernatural implies a certain irreparability in Senegal. But it also positions Souleiman and other lost migrants as heroes and implies their deaths, while tragic, were not futile.

I would argue that we can apply a similar "missing" status to migrants who remain in Europe for long periods of time with no return, distanced from their communities who often have little understanding of their challenges. These migrants' nebulous status as both present and absent, as neither successes nor failures, stems largely from their distance from home and the illegibility of their experiences. For migrants who remain abroad, this in-between status can constitute a form of entrapment, as they both know how difficult it will be to succeed and feel obligated to keep trying, fearing the consequences of an unsuccessful return.⁶⁶ At the same time, remaining abroad provides migrants with a form of spatial protection from judgements of their success or failure which are unavoidable upon return. Understanding success in migration thus requires privileging return, not the conditions preceding it. Understanding this importance of return—as a moment in which one's successes or failures are socially solidified—clarifies how return functions as part of Senegalese male migrants' habitus. This habitus is not only oriented toward return because of its promised rewards, but also because return functions as a reckoning for Senegalese migrants.

⁶⁶ Hernández-Carretero, "Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain," 126.

Chapter 3

In this chapter, I examine the data I gathered in three interviews with Senegalese men with migration experiences. I consider how these men experienced the cultural imaginary of migration prior to migrating and how it shaped their aspirations when they left Senegal. I then discuss a series of practices and discourses—surrounding precarity, sacrifice, and luck—which migrants employ to navigate and make sense of their challenges in the Global North. Finally, I consider return as a practice of negotiating expectations and obligations of reciprocity.

My three informants, Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane, had a variety of migration experiences. Babacar is from a small town of about five thousand people in southern Senegal. He migrated to France in the 1980s after graduating high school. He worked in construction in France for several years, before ultimately migrating to New York City via Canada in 1993. After working for 10 years as a welder in New York City, Babacar returned to his hometown. Since returning home, he has mostly taken care of his family's livestock while his now ex-wife worked as an elementary school teacher.

Moustapha, who is from Dakar, migrated to Italy via Spain in 2006. At that time, he was married and working as a vendor in a large market in Dakar. After 5 years of working in markets and using a friend's visa in Spain, he decided to travel to Portugal for a visa. He spent the next several years between Portugal and Italy, doing agricultural work in Italy and traveling to Portugal when his visa was about to expire. He eventually went to school in Portugal and got a diploma and passport. In 2017, he migrated to the United Kingdom, where he now lives with his wife and two children.

Ousmane migrated to Italy with a Belgian visa in 2003 after completing high school. He spent twelve years working as a street vendor in Italy. In 2015, he got a visa through Italy's

immigration regularization program, which allows him to travel between Senegal and Italy. He now runs an import-export business and spends his time between Senegal, where he now has a wife and children, and Italy.

As I will discuss further in this chapter, these men's varying ages when they first migrated, their access to capital from family members, and their hometowns in Senegal vastly influence how efficiently they were able to achieve success in migration. Further, each man's experiences speak to the importance of taking risks and relying on luck in successful migration. Regardless of their varying experiences, these three migrants' narratives illustrate how a shared habitus promotes a certain understanding of what migrants must endure abroad, as well as an ethos toward luck and success which positions the rewards of return as something migrants earn by their sacrifices abroad.

Stagnation, Frustration, and Inaccessible Wealth

Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane's experiences in Senegal before migrating illustrate how a culture of economic frustration and lack of opportunity, coupled with the perception that wealth is only accessible to migrants, contribute to young men's decisions to migrate. Young men's aspirations in migration are intimately connected to the opportunities they lack in Senegal. These conversations surrounding opportunity highlight the extent of young men's frustration, but they also reveal the centrality of reciprocity and family obligation to migration projects.

My informants consistently spoke of a lack of opportunity in Senegal which ultimately pushed them to migrate. For Babacar, who is from a small town in southern Senegal, living in a rural area where most people are subsistence farmers or run small businesses meant there were few opportunities for work where he could make significant money. Migrating therefore allowed

him to access a level of wealth which would have been practically impossible in his hometown. Moustapha, who is from Dakar, described a similar situation to that of the young men Prothmann interviewed in Pikine who felt that lacked work opportunities fitting their status;⁶⁷ despite being educated, Moustapha worked as a salesman in a popular market in Dakar, a job which was exhausting and did not allow him to adequately support his family. According to Moustapha, Senegalese young men's problems with work apply even to educated men, as it is hard to find work "even with lots of diplomas." He thus spoke to an understanding of the labor market in Senegal as fundamentally inaccessible and the belief, which Ralph highlighted in his article *Killing Time*, that attempts to better one's career prospects are therefore futile.

These challenges of finding work reveal a larger belief that wealth is inaccessible for all but a few in Senegal. Moustapha noted that "you can't get what you want in Senegal," and Ousmane described the situation in 2000 and 2001 (the years before he migrated), when the only people in Senegal who were building Houses or buying nice cars were those who migrated. These two men's discussion of Senegal as a place lacking opportunity—and, in Ousmane's case, as migration as a solution to this lack—highlight how the "spatial distribution of hope,"⁶⁸ coupled with economic realities, contribute to a configuration of Senegal as hopeless and of the Global North as the source of all wealth. In this spatial distribution of opportunity, migration becomes the only legible path to success. I also think it's relevant that both men framed their challenges as part of a larger social problem. Notably, Moustapha did not say that he migrated because he could not get what he wanted in Senegal, but because it is impossible for anyone to get what they want. He thus framed his own stagnation as part of a broader problem with Senegal not as a personal failing.

⁶⁷ Prothmann, "Migration, Masculinity, and Social Class," 99-100.

⁶⁸ Hernández-Carretero, "Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain," 116.

Another important component of these men's frustrations and desire to migrate was their perception that it is hard to plan for the future in Senegal. Specifically, my informants felt that it was hard to save money in Senegal and thus that life was very day to day. Moustapha described a conversation with his sister, who lived in New York and sent him some of the money he needed to migrate, which revealed the importance of savings in Senegal. Moustapha's sister told him that "you need to save to get what you want," but the fact that she later sent him money reveals an acknowledgment that saving is both extremely important and extremely difficult. Moustapha's sister pushed him to try to plan for the future and not live day to day, but she also recognized how his obligations to support his mother, sisters, and wife meant that saving money was nearly impossible. Torn between their daily obligations and their larger desires to change their situations—and those of the people they supported—my informants revealed how expectations of reciprocity can both push men to migrate and hinder their ability to do so. This challenge did not stop when they were abroad. While in the U.S., Babacar struggled to find money to build a house, feeling pressure to share with his family while also supporting himself. This calculus—of short-term obligation and of potential future opportunity—speaks to the fact that migrants often balance idealized aspirations, eg, building a house, with more pressing day to day needs.

This calculus of short and long-term obligation points to the central importance of the values of reciprocity and family obligation in Senegalese men's migration aspirations. As I have discussed, reciprocity is extremely important in Senegalese culture, and those with resources are expected to support those in their families or communities who are in need. Generosity is a moral and religious ideal, but it also confers respect on those who share their resources; one of the biggest markers of having "made it" in Senegal is being able to share with others through

hospitality and gifts. For all of my informants, their inability to adequately support their families—in Moustapha's words, *nourrir la famille*, to provide for his family—was central to their decision to migrate.

Si vous connaissez le Sénégal, vous savez que si vous avez une famille—une femme, une mère, des sœurs, des frères—et si vous travaillez, il faut aider les gens qui ne travaillent pas pour nourrir la famille, et vous ne pouvez pas le faire sans un bon travail. [If you know Senegal, you know that if you have a family—a wife, mother, sisters, brothers—and if you work, you have to help the people in your family who don't work to provide for your family, and you can't do this without a good job.]

Implicit in this description of family obligation is the fact that those who work are usually men, while those who don't work include elders—especially mothers—children, and often, though not always, women. Moustapha thus described a masculine family obligation, a value which he felt he could only achieve if he migrated. In the following section, I examine how two other common migration aspirations, marriage and home building, contribute to a specific, masculine understanding of a better life.

Marriage, Home Building, and the Dream of a Better Life

My informants' discussions of their aspirations for migration, specifically their desire to build houses in Senegal, speak to several of the norms and values of Senegalese migration. For Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane, migration was about aspiring to a certain kind of masculinity, one which was oriented toward family and which emphasized the importance of home ownership and community status. While only one of my informants mentioned it explicitly, these markers of success and migration are overtly masculine, not because women do not migrate but because of the social positions men aim to occupy on return.

My informants consistently named building a house as their largest concrete hope for migration. Unlike their desire to support their families at home through remittances, building a house required saving money, often at the expense of sending remittances, and having a contact point in Senegal who could oversee the project and keep an eye on the money. Migrants' practice of building houses in their home countries is well documented. In Senegal, home building is one of the primary ways that young men can accumulate wealth and gives families stability and a place to live after retirement, but Buggenhagen emphasizes these homes' symbolic qualities as well.⁶⁹ Many Mourid migrants have built homes in Touba, even though building in Dakar is a better investment; this decision to “invest their earnings in the development of the spiritual metropolis of Touba” points to the importance of home building as a social and religious statement.⁷⁰ In Babacar's case, building a house was both a visible display of wealth and a physical representation of his commitment to his wife and child, who until then had lived with his wife's family. Building a house is also a practical investment which speaks to the kind of life migrants aspire to upon return. While starting a business might imply a desire to continue accumulating capital in Senegal, building a house signifies a desire to return to Senegal to live a comfortable life, not to work. I will further discuss this understanding of work and pace of life later in this chapter.

Home building is one component of the better life migrants hope to have upon return. The other important component is getting married. For men such as Babacar and Ousmane who migrate in their early twenties, marriage is one of the implied goals of migration; neither said they hoped to find a wife because they migrated, but they did discuss a certain understanding of

⁶⁹ Beth Buggenhagen, *Muslim Families in Global Senegal: Money Takes Care of Shame* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2012), 21.

⁷⁰ Buggenhagen, 19.

the better life they hoped which centered around the creation of a family. In my interview with Babacar, I asked if he or other young men migrated so they could get married. He responded that migration is more about building a better life:

No, the dream of going abroad, our dream is to build up a better life. A better life for Africans, for us Africans, is very simple. An African, if he gets small money, the first thing he's going to do is get married. He can get married, he can get a wife, two wives, three wives. And then if he gets enough money, he tries to build a house.

Babacar's understanding of a better life made explicit the gendered dynamics of migration aspirations. Men don't migrate to get married, but rather to achieve a social position of which being married is only a part. It is important to note that, while marriage establishes both men and women as adults, its function as a marker of adulthood and as a show of status—determined by who men can marry and how many wives they can afford—for men. Babacar married a woman whose sister was the third wife of the area's king, and this marital connection to the royal family certainly elevated Babacar's status.

Like home building, this desire to achieve a better life is part of Senegalese male migration's orientation toward return. Just as home building is an investment in a certain kind of life—one oriented toward home, not toward work—Babacar's understanding of a better life represents a commitment to a life upon return which centers one's role as a man in the family and community. It is important to note that being from a rural area certainly influenced Babacar's understanding of a better life. Rather than establishing his social position on return with a nice car or business investment, he did so with his house and family, thus showing how male migrants' habitus orients them not just toward Senegal more broadly, but toward a specific vision of home and life upon return. Migrants hope to return to Senegal, but they also aspire to return to their specific communities, where they can solidify their success abroad by establishing themselves as important community members and family men.

Myth Making and Decision Making in Migration

In Chapter 2, I examined narratives surrounding Europe as a place of opportunity and migrants' roles as profits for Europe. In *The Belly of the Atlantic*, Fatou Diome depicts one interpretation of how migrants participate in the process of myth making surrounding migration, Europe, and opportunity. In this section, I examine how my informants participated in and understood similar discourses, and how these discourses shaped both their decisions to migrate and their efforts to communicate their experiences upon return.

All three of my informants shared how understandings of the Global North as a place of opportunity shaped their decisions to migrate. Ousmane described a general belief in Senegal that there are no problems in Europe and that it is a place where you can make easy money, noting that people in Senegal think Europe is like heaven, *paradis*. Much of this understanding of Europe stems from returning migrants' visible displays of wealth, e.g., houses and nice cars. Ousmane noted that even migrants who are struggling in Europe present themselves as successful by dressing nicely when they are visiting home. Migrants' efforts to position themselves as successful thus participate in larger understandings of what Europe and migration have to offer.

All of my informants described a process of renegotiating and reinterpreting these myths when they arrived in Europe or the United States, often finding that their expectations were not completely incorrect, but rather that they had underestimated how long they would take. Ousmane noted that he knew migrants sometimes got visas through Italy's immigration regularization program, but didn't anticipate waiting 12 years for his visa. It is important to recognize that, at least for the men I interviewed, myths about the Global North were more exaggerated than fake.

In addition to broader understandings of the Global North as a place of opportunity, my informants also engaged with narratives about specific countries as they made migration decisions. Moustapha initially migrated to Belgium with a Belgian visa, but decided to travel to Italy because he knew more people there. He later began traveling to Portugal because he heard from other migrants that it was easier to get a visa there. His migration decisions can thus be understood as a process of negotiating both practical concerns—e.g., if he would find a community of Senegalese—and other migrants' narratives of success or failure in certain countries. Babacar's decision to migrate to the United States was similarly shaped by a combination of personal experiences—including as an undocumented migrant in France—and myths about the United States as a place of freedom and opportunity. Babacar understood the United States as a place where you can “build up your life,” and where, if you don't cause problems or break the law, you can make a lot of money. This understanding of the United States reflects the country's promise to be a land of opportunity, but it is also clear that Babacar understood the freedom the United States offers in the context of his earlier migration experiences in Europe, where he struggled to find work and was constantly hounded by police. Like Moustapha's understanding that it was easier to get a visa in Portugal than in France, Babacar's confidence in the United States and the opportunity he would find there illustrate how migrants participate in a process of myth making and knowledge creation surrounding migration and potential migration destinations, a process which continues when they return home.

My informants' conversations with family and friends reveal how migration decisions are shaped by other migrants' success, and, to a lesser degree, their advice to prospective migrants. Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane described struggling to explain their challenges in Europe to people in Senegal and feeling that people at home didn't believe them when they tried to explain

how hard life was as a migrant. Ousmane framed this challenge as largely stepping from the disconnect between migrants' descriptions of their time abroad and the material success they project when they return to Senegal:

Quand quelqu'un est en Italie, ou en Espagne, en France, il n'a même pas le temps de s'habiller. Il n'a même pas le temps de bien manger. Mais une fois que tu décides de retourner en Afrique, et là, tu commences à acheter des habits, des trucs comme ça, et les gens qui sont au Sénégal voient que du positif sur vous car vous êtes venue en vacances. [When someone is in Italy, or Spain, or France, he doesn't even have the time to dress himself well. He doesn't even have the time to eat well. But once you decide to return to Africa, and there, you begin to buy clothes and things like that, the people in Senegal only see the positive parts of your life because you're on vacation.]

As this quotation illustrates, migrants' time on vacation in Senegal can be misleading to other young men, who see only how migrants live on vacation and not how they live in Europe, where they are busy with work and can't always afford the luxuries they can in Senegal.

Ousmane also noted that people don't believe his warnings that Europe isn't perfect because he chooses to return. For Ousmane, the decision to return to Europe entails more reward than risk; he already has a visa, and he has a successful business which he travels to maintain. Men who are migrating for the first time can't expect the rewards that Ousmane can because, while he is already over the proverbial hump and has overcome most of his challenges, they are not.

Ultimately, what matters to prospective migrants is less the advice they receive from migrants who have returned—although this advice is important, particularly in choosing migration destinations—but rather how successful these return migrants are. For Ousmane's friends who are considering migration, his success is more important than any warning he could provide because it proves everything he experienced was ultimately worth it. Paradoxically, his success thus gives him the authority to speak about Europe while also undermining anything negative he might say about his time abroad.

Precurity in Migration

Thus far, I have examined various elements of the cultural imaginary of male migration in Senegal. The following three sections of this chapter focus on the discourses, practices, and values which make up the habitus of return-oriented Senegalese male migrants. In this section, I examine the strategies which migrants use to navigate legal migration regimes, as well as how legal precarity contributes to our understanding of migration as entrapment. As I have mentioned previously, it is important to note that my informants arrived in their migration destinations legally, but then overstayed their visas and became undocumented. Thus, while they were in legally precarious situations at certain points of time while abroad, their experiences were very different from those of *clandestins* who never obtains visas and are always legally vulnerable.

Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane's experiences as undocumented migrants in Europe illustrate how the European migration crisis has contributed to an increasingly hostile migration experiences for African men. Moustapha described having several run-ins with the police in Italy, and Babacar was once arrested and jailed for two months in France because he didn't have a visa. Babacar also noted that people in France will follow you around and ask for your identification if you're Black, an issue which he didn't experience as much in the United States. These stories reveal a climate of widespread xenophobia and racism in receiving countries which appears to have been heightened by the European migration crisis; narratives about African migrants "overrunning" Europe increasingly justify widespread harassment and criminalization of Black men. They also point to the fact that "borders are no longer at the border,"⁷¹ but rather "proliferate throughout society," meaning borders are not a one-time obstacle but rather a daily

⁷¹ Vaughan-William cited in Vammen p. 2

challenge.⁷² Thus, borders are not just a challenge when migrants enter a country, but also look for jobs, work informally, or just exist in public spaces.

At the same time, these stories also reveal a somewhat matter-of-fact attitude toward precarity among Senegalese migrants. All three of my informants were undocumented at some point—often for years at a time—and, while they were not the kind of clandestine migrants who board pirogues to reach Europe, they did sometimes refer to themselves as *clandestins*, as well as *sans-papiers* (undocumented). They spoke matter of factly about their encounters with police, their use of friends' documents to find work, and the general predicament of migrant hawkers who often must hide their wares and run from the police. This is not to say that they were comfortable with their status as undocumented migrants, but rather that being undocumented and weathering its challenges has become part of habitus of Senegalese male migrants. In her study of Senegalese migrants' journeys to Argentina, Vammen notes that initiatives to curb African migration to Europe have just pushed these migrants toward increasingly dangerous routes and to destinations further afield, e.g., South America.⁷³ Such initiatives did not dissuade my informants from migrating, but rather pushed them into increased precarity in Europe.

My informants' paths to their migration destinations reveal a practice of itinerant migration which allowed them to circumvent legal restrictions, while also placing them in legally marginal positions. Making it to their goal destination was often a process, requiring years of saving money—including as a migrant in other countries—and a willingness to cobble together documents and take indirect routes to reach their destination. Babacar, Moustapha, and Ousmane all arrived in their final migration destination after flying to another nearby country where they

⁷² Ida Marie Savio Vammen, "New Contested Borderlands: Senegalese Migrants En Route to Argentina," *Comparative Migration Studies* 7, no. 1 (December 2019): 2.

⁷³ Vammen, "New Contested Borderlands," 5.

could get a visa: Babacar traveled to Canada before crossing the border into the United States, Moustapha traveled to Belgium before going to Italy, and Ousmane arrived in Italy via Spain. Vammen describes a similar practice among Senegalese migrants in Argentina, who often traveled first to Brazil before traveling overland to Argentina.⁷⁴ By making use of different countries' migration policies, as well as networks of other migrants and their accumulated knowledge, my informants were able to achieve their migration goals, even as restrictions grew tighter. Crucially, this itinerant migration is only possible because of migrants' social capital; connections both in Senegal and in their destination countries give migrants the information and resources necessary to circumvent legal routes.

Moustapha's experiences in Italy and Portugal are a clear illustration of both how social capital facilitates this practice of itinerant migration and of how migrants' legal status traps them in long, often fruitless, migration projects. Moustapha flew to Belgium with a Belgian visa, but decided after a week to travel to Italy because he knew more Senegalese there. In Italy, he struggled to find a job because he was undocumented, but he was able to borrow a friend's documents and use them to get a job he ended up working for 5 years. He then decided to travel to Portugal because he heard it was easier to get a visa there, and he spent the next several years traveling between Portugal and Italy, going to Italy for work and returning when his visa was about to expire. At the same time, he also studied Portuguese and got a diploma in Portugal. He eventually got a Portuguese passport, which he later used to travel to the UK. Moustapha emphasized the importance of having papers, noting that "you can do what you want" once you have them. Several of his friends had Italian visas and were able to work good jobs and travel to Senegal because of it.

⁷⁴ Vammen, 7-8.

Moustapha's story reveals some of the strategies migrants use to circumvent "contemporary mobility regimes," but they also point to the role of migrants' legal status in their decision making.⁷⁵ As I have previously discussed, migration can be understood as a form of entrapment, as migrants often feel obligated to continue sending remittances and feel that they must return successfully given how much they have invested in migrating.⁷⁶ This entrapment is heightened for undocumented migrants, whose legal precarity means they are not only socially and financially invested in succeeding in migration, but are also legally trapped in their specific migration projects. Not having papers makes it hard to succeed as a temporary migrant, but it also makes it impossible to succeed in the ways Moustapha and Ousmane have: as semi-permanent migrants. Being undocumented thus forces migrants into a specific migration regime, one which is both ostensibly temporary and one time and which also has the potential to drag on indefinitely.

Luck, Sacrifice, and Pace of Life

In addition to involving a series of extra-legal practices required to navigate increasingly restrictive migration regimes, the practice of Senegalese male migration also includes discourses and attitudes surrounding sacrifice, luck, and pace of life. My informants' descriptions of the risks they took when migrating and of migrants who failed point to an understanding of migration as a gamble which requires both hard work and good luck. In our interview, Ousmane talked extensively about *destin* (luck, fate, or fortune), noting that everyone has their destiny in migration.

⁷⁵ Vammen, 2.

⁷⁶ Hernández-Carretero, "Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain," 126.

Tu vois dans la vie, chacun a son destin. Moi, j'ai un frère, un autre frère, un petit frère qui est arrivé quatre ans après moi. Il a eu les papiers avant que moi, t'as vue, pour vous expliquer que chacun a son destin. Vous pouvez voir quelqu'un qui a fait vingt ans en Italie, vingt ans en Europe, et il vit toujours avec les coloc. Car nous, on est des musulmans, on croit au destin. Vous voyez beaucoup de personnes qui ont réussi leurs immigrations et d'autres qui ont échoué. Moi, je connais des gens qui avaient des biens avant de quitter le Sénégal, qui avaient beaucoup de biens. Mais en voyant les autres retournaient avec des beaux habits, des trucs comme ça, ils ont laissé le travail pour aller en Europe et là, ils ont échoué. [You see, in life, everyone has their destiny. I have a brother, a younger brother, who arrived four years after me. He got papers before me, you see, which shows you that everyone has their destiny. There are people who have spent twenty years in Italy, twenty years in Europe, and who still live with roommates. Because us Senegalese, we're Muslims, and we believe in fate. You see lots of people who have succeeded in migration and others who have failed. I know people who had property before leaving Senegal, who had lots of resources. But after seeing migrants return with beautiful clothes and things like that, they left their jobs to go to Europe and there, they failed.]

While Ousmane did note certain things that make a migrant more likely to succeed—e.g., being educated—he framed them not as guarantees but as potential benefits. Ousmane noted that he believes in destiny because he is a Muslim, but I would argue that he also believes in destiny because he is a migrant. Understanding one's migration success as completely out of one's hands was both deeply accurate and points to the importance of a discourse of luck and chance in contemporary Senegalese migration. Contrary to earlier understandings of migration, which emphasized migrants' courage as a determinant of success, this discourse attributes success to luck or destiny. I understand the growing importance of luck as a product of increasingly inaccessible and dangerous migration pathways. In particular, the European migration crisis begs an understanding of migration failure—in this case, death—not as a personal failing but as a result of terrible luck. Understanding migration success or failure as one's destiny allows migrants to cope with challenges abroad and interpret them as part of their larger destiny in migration.

Understanding migration as destiny also means that migrants often view their sacrifices not as futile, but rather as part of the natural progression of their path towards migration success. When Moustapha first arrived in Italy and was struggling to find work, he often talked to his friends who had migrated earlier about his challenges. These friends told him that “when it starts getting really hard, it will get better soon.” These words of support from a successful migrant to a struggling one point to the belief that migration is a predictable process, with a natural pace and challenges—but also rewards—that one should expect. In this understanding of migration, challenges are not something one can or should avoid, but rather something one must push through to succeed. Implicitly, migration thus requires sacrifice, not just in a general sense, e.g., leaving Senegal, but in a specific one; struggling and sacrifice are built into migrants’ paths to success.

My informants’ discussions of the sacrifices they made abroad reveal that, in order to succeed, migrants are willing not only to work long hours and to tolerate inconsistent and precarious jobs, but also more broadly to live a kind of life they would not be willing to live at home in Senegal. In addition to talking about migrants’ challenging work situations, Ousmane also noted that migrants don't even have time to eat or dress well, two important aspects of living well in Senegal. Migrants are willing to sacrifice the most important aspects of their lives—their communities, their families, etc.—in Senegal when they are abroad so they can commit more time to work. Much of the sacrifice is not migrants’ decision, but rather is forced by their legal and economic situations. Regardless, it points to an understanding that certain things must be tolerated abroad which one would never tolerate at home: essentially, that being in Europe requires living a different kind of life with different priorities, a life which will be justified when one returns home successful.

I understand this attitude toward labor and sacrifice abroad as connected to the spatial distribution of hope which pushes migrants to Europe for opportunity. Associating the West with hope and opportunity confers certain qualities on the West and what life is for there, qualities which contrast with those of Senegal, a place for family and life, but not necessarily success. Ultimately, my interviews suggest that Senegalese migrants understand the West as a place for work and Senegal is a place to live. This creates a set of expectations for the kind of life they will tolerate in Europe, as Europe is where they go to work, not to actually live their real lives. While they found that being abroad and working constantly was challenging, it was also what my informants were looking for when they migrated; Babacar was certainly tired in the United States, but he also chose to go to the United States because he would be able to work a lot and framed the United States as a place where you get to work and build up your life. His explanation of how Senegalese view work further illustrates how migrants weather their challenges by understanding them as temporary and goal focused. He noted that Senegalese work until they have saved up for something, e.g., marriage, a house, while Europeans view jobs as something they will be doing for a long time and tend to think about working for things in the distant future. This attitude towards work implies both a willingness to make sacrifices—because, unlike for Europeans, a job is temporary—and an understanding that these sacrifices serve a larger goal: building a good life in Senegal.

Ultimately, these attitudes toward work abroad are attitudes about pace of life and speak to the importance of living a good life because of migration. Migration is not just about making money; if it was, migrants would stay abroad for longer. Rather, it is about making the money you need to have a certain kind of life in Senegal, one to which family and home are central. Many return migrants rent out properties or own small businesses, but few work the long hours

they worked abroad. Even Ousmane, who splits his time between Italy and Senegal, runs a business which allows him to return home about every two months and to stay in Senegal for extended periods of time. Senegal is thus where migrants want to return to live, not to work. After ten years of working 6 days a week as a welder in New York City, Babacar was happy to be home and to be back to a life that wasn't rushed; he was tired of the pace of life in the United States and wanted to return to a more livable place:

At the time, for myself, I was very happy. I was very happy because I'm gonna go back home now, to my house. And the life, again, it's not rushed life, like here. And when I told them, "I'm gonna come back home," they said, "Why are you gonna come back home? Why don't you stay? Why come back home? What are you going to do here? There's nothing to do here, it's much better to stay there." Oh, no, life is not like this, it's completely different. I went to go and work and make money, and now I've decided to go back home. My mind, it's thinking about my home. I had to come back home, otherwise, I'm gonna be another person.

The comment that Babacar should have stayed in New York City is interesting because Babacar wanted to return precisely because there was "nothing to do" in his hometown. While lack of opportunity pushed Babacar to migrate, the pace of life which accompanies it ultimately brought him home. The very qualities which make Senegal unattractive to young men who aspire to wealth and status in their communities are what make Senegal attractive to men who have achieved success abroad. In many ways, the life migrants return to is very similar to the one many young men lead before migrating—not busy with work, but rather oriented toward family and friends—just with the addition of more resources and more respect.

Return and the Moral Economy of Sharing and Wealth

In the final section of this chapter, I hope to examine return and the moral economy of sharing and wealth as it relates to migration. I use the frame of return as a reckoning to understand how return functions as a moment of closure for migration projects and serves as an

estimation of migrants' success abroad. At the same time, return as reckoning reveals how migrants continue to negotiate their success and social position, even after a successful return. Return is thus a reckoning both for migrants—for whom it is a change to consolidate and define their success—and their communities. In addition to examining how migrants are treated upon return and how this treatment serves to establish them as successful, I also consider how the moral economy of sharing and expectations of generosity shape how communities understand successful migrants.

I would be remiss to treat all my informants' experiences as the same in the section, as they perhaps diverge most upon return. Besides vacations, Ousmane remains in Europe; Moustapha splits his time between Italy and Senegal; Babacar returned to his hometown in 2003 and has remained there since. It is also important to note that Babacar's hometown in southern Senegal is vastly different from Dakar, where Moustapha and Ousmane are from. While Babacar was not the first person in his community to migrate, he was the first to go to the United States, and the milieu he frequented is very different from those of Moustapha and Ousmane, who know many other migrants. In the section, I mostly focus on Babacar's experience of return, although I also examine how Moustapha and Ousmane felt about their time in Senegal when they visited.

My informants' descriptions of how they were treated upon return—and their efforts to navigate these relationships—illustrate how migrants' success and social position are consolidated when they return home. My informants described being treated with more respect and encountered assumptions that they were now wealthy and thus had outgrown their communities. Babacar noted that people he'd grown up with felt that he was now better than them, and he described wanting them to understand that he was still the same person as before he migrated. Ousmane similarly shared that people in Senegal think migrants have higher standards

after their time in Europe. Migration thus delivered the rewards it promised: wealth, respect, and symbolic capital which positioned them as important members of the community. For Babacar and Ousmane, however, these assumptions were a source of frustration, as their efforts to return to their old lives were complicated by new social dynamics and inequalities. For Babacar, it appears that these assumptions went mostly unchallenged, but that over time his relationships with friends mostly returned to what they were before he migrated. When I stayed with his family in 2022, however, it was clear that he was still something of a big man in the community. Ousmane was adamant that while it is normal for people to treat you differently when you return, it is “your job to remember where you came from.” The fact that these men were resigned to being treated differently points to the power of the cultural imaginary of Senegalese male migration and the archetype of the successful migrant, as depicted in *The Belly of the Atlantic*. But it also reveals a deep frustration with the illegibility of their experiences.

I am particularly interested in Babacar’s frustrations over how his old friends perceived him because they—like his desire to come home and relax in Senegal—imply a certain desire to go back to the way things were before he migrated. Just as he was looking forward to returning to his hometown and living a quiet agricultural life, Babacar also wanted to return to his pre-migration relationships. Notably, while he was able to achieve the first goal, the second was more challenging because his status in the community had changed. While being a migrant might lend itself well to returning to a slower pace of life, Babacar’s migrant status—and, as I will later discuss, the wealth it implied—complicated his relationships by giving him more resources and status than his former peers. This desire to go back to how things were reveals something about how migrants who are away for long periods of time understand this time. For migrants like Babacar, who only returned home a few times while he was in New York City, being abroad was

an interlude in his normal life, a time for work and saving, but not living life like he wanted to. While he was in contact with family, he wasn't really a part of family or community life in a gratifying way. It thus makes sense that he would want to return to how things were; for him, the ten years he spent in New York City were not the same ten years that passed for his community. This is not to say that Babacar's time in New York City was not real or that he had no community there, but rather that, because he was living a life oriented toward work while life was going on at home, he wanted to return to a time when he was still part of his community and when they understood him as he was: before he migrated.

Babacar's frustrations with his community and their perceptions of him were exacerbated by community members' expectations of generosity. Noting that people in Senegal respect you when they know you have money and want something from you, he described people's assumptions that he was rich and would be more generous than other community members. These people thought he had "everything for them," and, while he always obliged people's requests, they were clearly a major source of frustration. Thus, the very thing he migrated for—wealth—also strained his relationships; his success made it impossible to go back to how things were because it created such an intense expectation of generosity, an expectation which he would grow to resent. Babacar was not the only one of my informants to express such resentment and frustration surrounding money. When Ousmane sent money home to build his house, he worried that the money would disappear and made sure someone he trusted was in charge of it to prevent this. Babacar's community, however, meant that he experienced more tension surrounding money and sharing than Moustapha or Ousmane, who are both from Dakar and had families and friends who had successfully migrated. Unlike Moustapha and Ousmane, who were known migrants in their circles but not necessarily to all of Dakar, everyone in Babacar's hometown

knew he had just returned from ten years abroad. Further, while other people in his community had migrated, he was particularly visible because of his success and the fact that he went to the United States. He stood out, both as someone who you could ask about the United States and as someone you could ask for help when your house needed repairs, your wife got sick, etc. Returning home forced Babacar to reckon with his new position as a return migrant, and all the involved expectations.

We can understand returning as a community reckoning: Did you build a house? Are you generous? We can also understand it as a personal reckoning, as migrants try to reconcile their success with their very real challenges abroad, their newfound wealth with the tensions it creates in their relationships. In many ways, return is therefore a reckoning with the promises of migration: Did it deliver what it promised? And was it worth it? I think you would be hard pressed to find a “successful” migrant who regrets going abroad. But I also think that, even if we accept that the rewards of migration justify migrants’ challenges abroad, there are a series of social challenges which migrants face upon return which are not explicitly included in the cultural imaginary of migration. Discourses surrounding migration in Senegal certainly condemn dangerous migration routes and encourage young men to invest in their home country rather than risking their lives abroad, and my informants’ discussions of their challenges in Europe and the United States demonstrate the extent to which migrants talk to one another about these challenges. It does not appear, however, that the challenges Babacar faced when he returned home are a significant part of Senegalese discourse surrounding migration. This is likely partially due to Senegalese cultural expectations surrounding reciprocity and sharing; most of the things that frustrated Babacar were standard Senegalese expectations of generosity, writ large. Thus, Babacar’s frustrations were not necessarily because he was a migrant, but because he was a man

with wealth and status, a situation which he never experienced before migrating. At the same time, I think the fact that these issues are largely absent from Senegalese criticisms of migration reveals the extent to which return is understood as the end of migration. If we consider successful return as the goal of migration, there is little space for discussions of how “successful” return may present its own challenges.

Conclusions

In this thesis, I have examined the cultural imaginary of Senegalese male migration with an eye to both the history of migration in Senegal and recent discourses surrounding the European migration crisis. Understanding this cultural imaginary allowed me to study the habitus of temporary Senegalese male migrants and the ways this habitus orients migrants toward life and family in Senegal. As I have illustrated, migration projects are both economic decisions and social ones; we cannot understand Senegalese male migrants as simply rational economic actors, but rather as individuals who choose to migrate both because of economic conditions and social expectations. Much of the literature on migration—including many of the works I have referenced in this thesis—examines this question of why people migrate: economic stagnation, family obligations, cultural understandings of migration as a path to opportunity. While studying the conditions leading to migration is certainly important, I think the question of “why” in migration too often focuses on pre-migration conditions at the expense of examining what justifies the challenges of migration for those who experience them. I thus propose talking not about why Senegalese men migrate, but rather about what migration is for. In doing so, we can examine migration not as a single event, but as an aspect of migrants’ life courses. Considering the expected futures of migration also makes it clearer how migrants understand their time abroad and the challenges they face there. Ultimately, Senegalese male migration is a project oriented toward an expected future, and our understanding of migration must thus also be oriented toward this future.

As I discuss in Chapter 3, migration is not just about making money, but about building a certain kind of life in Senegal. This life—not money, or a house, or other material possessions—is the reward of migration. Senegalese migration is thus an economic project because it is about

what money can do for migrants and their families in Senegal, not how much money migrants can accumulate or how nice of a life they can build in Senegal. This understanding of migration as for building a certain kind of life applies both to both more typical labor migrants, like Babacar, and others who may not return to Senegal; even from Europe, Moustapha and Ousmane have invested the rewards of their migration in family and community. Thus, when I argue in this thesis that Senegalese male migration is oriented towards Senegal, I mean that it is oriented toward family, home, and community in Senegal. Migration is for building a certain kind of life for migrants, and this life includes their specific communities, families, and aspirations for a good life in Senegal. Notably, my informants did not look to migration as a way to fundamentally alter their lives, but rather as a way to improve their current positions and their ability to care for family. Even for Moustapha and Ousmane, who now live at least part-time in Europe, migration has always been about building a better life for themselves and their families, not about moving to Europe or starting a business.

Part of understanding Senegalese male migration lies in the gap between what migration is for and what migration actually does for Senegalese men. Much of this gap between aspirations and reality can be attributed to inaccessible borders, dangerous migration journeys, and bad luck. But even successful migrants have to contend with lives upon return which do not meet all their expectations, or which carry unexpected baggage. Successful migrants—consider Babacar—can find themselves in a paradox, where their migration success alters the very relationships and communities they migrated for. This is not to say that expectations of generosity and sharing create tensions for all migrants, as migrants' ability to be generous also can strengthen their relationships. Rather, this paradox points to the complexity of defining success in migration, even when we know what migration is for. Migration is for family and

community and generosity, but it is also, particularly for non-migrants, for wealth. Senegalese migration shows us how the moral economy of sharing and wealth can become both a space for men to reinforce their family ties and community status and an arena for the negotiation of familial tensions and social inequalities.

Considering what migration is for allows for a more genuine understanding of Senegalese men's migration projects, not as economic decisions driven by labor supply and demand or cultural practices divorced from practical realities, but rather as means by which Senegalese men strive for a kind of life which has become increasingly inaccessible in Senegal. What is perhaps most striking about this kind of life—and about what it teaches us about Senegalese male migration—is that it is not vastly different from the lives men lead before they migrate. My informants' hopes for migration were to live improved, scaled-up versions of their old lives: lives with larger homes, less tedious and underpaid work, and more money to share, but not to the extent that their success would distance them from the people for whom they wanted to be successful. Migration is about time and scale; it is about accessing capital more efficiently in order to live a good life—a life which is explicitly Senegalese—with more resources. Understanding that migration is for improving one's circumstances in such a way highlights the extent to which the good life is inaccessible in Senegal, but, more importantly, it problematizes our understanding of migration as transformative for Senegal and Senegalese communities. Migration does not transform Senegalese communities, but rather allows people to live a good life which has long been inaccessible.

Limitations

This thesis and the informants I interviewed are just a part of the variety of Senegalese migration experiences. Two of my informants are educated Dakar natives who were successful abroad and live, at least part-time, in Europe; the other, Babacar, has experiences which are more consistent with other labor migrants I read about: legal precarity, blue collar work, and a definite return home. Notably, all my informants succeeded in their migration projects, meaning my thesis lacks the perspectives of men who failed abroad and had to confront the consequences of this failure. All of my informants also left Senegal before 2010, so their experiences likely do not reflect the increasing difficulty many prospective migrants face today. Were I to complete this thesis again, I would like to conduct more interviews with a broader range—in age, wealth, year of migration, migration destination, and hometown in Senegal—of informants in order to have a more complete picture of how the habitus of Senegalese migrants operates for different men.

The other major limitation of this thesis was my ability to conduct interviews in French over WhatsApp. I was able to understand everything my informants told me, but I was not able to work with my informants to develop the depth I would have hoped for and could have achieved more easily in English. Much of this challenge was due to language, but I also found that WhatsApp was not the ideal medium for this research, as it made it harder to read how my informants felt about certain situations and discouraged some of the conversation and reflection which in-person interviews can foster. Obviously, none of my informants live in San Antonio and WhatsApp was thus necessary for this project, but it is still important to acknowledge its limitations.

References

- “About Us – SeneHouston.” Accessed March 6, 2023. <https://senehouston.org/about-us/>.
- Baldassar, Loretta and Laura Merla. “Introduction: Transnational Family Caregiving Through the Lens of Circulation.” In *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, edited by Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla, 3-24. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.
- Beauchemin, Cris, Papa Sakho, Bruno Schoumaker, and Marie-Laurence Flahaux. “From Senegal and Back (1975–2008): Migration Trends and Routes of Migrants in Times of Restrictions.” In *Migration Between Africa and Europe*, edited by Cris Beauchemin, 363-396. New York City: Springer Cham, 2018.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Bredeloup, Sylvie. “The Migratory Adventure as a Moral Experience.” In *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, edited by Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen, 134-53. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
- Brooks, George E. “Peanuts and Colonialism: Consequences of the Commercialization of Peanuts in West Africa, 1830-70.” *The Journal of African History* 16, no. 1 (1975): 29–54.
- Buggenhagen, Beth. “Domestic Object(ion)s: The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Politics of Marriage Payments, Love, and State Privatization.” In *Producing African Futures: Ritual and Reproduction in a Neoliberal Age*, edited by Brad Weiss, 21-53. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004.
- Buggenhagen, Beth. *Muslim Families in Global Senegal: Money Takes Care of Shame*. Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2012.
- Buggenhagen, Beth. “Prophets and Profits: Gendered and Generational Visions of Wealth and Value in Senegalese Murid Households.” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 4 (2001): 373–401.
- CIA. “Senegal.” In *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency, February 27, 2023. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/senegal/#people-and-society>.
- Coe, Cati. *The Scattered Family: Parenting, African Migrants, and Global Inequality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Diome, Fatou. *Celles qui attendent*. Paris: Flammarion, 2010.

- Diome, Fatou. *The Belly of the Atlantic*. Translated by Lulu Norman and Ros Schwartz. Paris: Editions Anne Carrière, 2003.
- Diop, Mati, dir. *Atlantics*. 2019: Netflix.
- Dougnon, Isaie. "Migration as Coping with Risk and State Barriers: Malian Migrants' Conception of Being Far from Home." In *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives*, edited by Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy, 35-58. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Engbersen, Godfried. "Migration Transitions in an Era of Liquid Migration: Reflections on Fassmann and Reeger." In *European Immigrations: Trends, Structures and Policy Implications*, edited by Marek Okólski, 91–106. Amsterdam University Press, 2012.
- Flippen, Chenoa A., and Dylan Farrell-Bryan. "New Destinations and the Changing Geography of Immigrant Incorporation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47, no. 1 (July 31, 2021): 479–500. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-090320-100926>.
- Galt, Rosalind. "The Spirits of African Cinema: Redemptive Aesthetics in Mati Diop's *Atlantics*." *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism* 10 (2022): 97–106.
- Hannaford, Dinah. *Marriage Without Borders: Transnational Spouses in Neoliberal Senegal*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.
- Hernández-Carretero, María. "Hope and Uncertainty in Senegalese Migration to Spain: Taking Chances on Emigration but not Upon Return." In *Hope and Uncertainty in Contemporary African Migration*, edited by Nauja Kleist and Dorte Thorsen, 113-33. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
- Hernández-Carretero, María. "Renegotiating Obligations through Migration: Senegalese Transnationalism and the Quest for the Right Distance." *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 41, no. 12 (October 2015): 2021–40.
- Kane, Abdoulaye and Todd H. Leedy. "Introduction: African Patterns of Migration in a Global Era: New Perspectives." In *African Migrations: Patterns and Perspectives*, edited by Abdoulaye Kane and Todd H. Leedy, 1-16. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- Le Soleil. "Emigration clandestine: 73 candidats portés disparus au large de la Libye," February 15, 2023. <https://lesoleil.sn/emigration-clandestine-73-candidats-portes-disparus-au-large-de-la-libye/>.
- Mark, Peter. "Urban Migration, Cash Cropping, and Calamity: The Spread of Islam among the Diola of Boulouf (Senegal), 1900-1940." *African Studies Review* 21, no. 2 (1978): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/523658>.

Melly, Caroline M. "Titanic Tales of Missing Men: Reconfigurations of National Identity and Gendered Presence in Dakar, Senegal." *American Ethnologist* 38, no. 2 (2011): 361–76. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01311.x>.

Ralph, Michael. "Killing Time." *Social Text* 26, no. 4 [97] (2008 Winter 2008): 1–29.

Reynolds, Tracey and Elisabetta Zontini. "Care Circulation in Transnational Families: Social and Cultural Capitals in Italian and Caribbean Migrant Communities in Britain." In *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, edited by Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla, 203-19. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

Rofheart, Mahriana. *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media*. New York: Lexington Books, 2013.

Spener, David. "Passing Judgment: Coyotes in the Discourse of Clandestine Border-Crossing." In *Clandestine Crossings: Migrants and Coyotes on the Texas-Mexico Border*, 1st ed., 201–29. Cornell University Press, 2009.

Stoller, Paul. *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Wall, Karin, and Claudio Bolzman. "Mapping the New Plurality of Transnational Families: A Life Course Perspective." In *Transnational Families, Migration and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, edited by Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla, PAGES. New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

World Bank Group. "Phase II: COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens." *Migration and Development Brief* 33, 2020.