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Historicising ‘Irregular’ Migration from Senegal to Europe

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Abstract

Contemporary discourses on migration from West Africa to Europe tend to frame migrants as victims of syndicated trafficking cartels that truck in human desperation. As part of this narrative, migrants are increasingly portrayed as ‘modern-day slaves’ in need of humanitarian protection. In both media and policy circles, African migrants are commonly referred to as desperate travellers who fall prey to exploitative ‘slave traders’ on their clandestine journeys to Europe. And yet, such framings do not adequately account for the ways in which migration from West Africa to Europe has a long and profound history, and thus does not sufficiently correspond to histories of enslavement. Nor do such framings appreciate how contemporary movements within and outside West Africa are informed by interrelated political genealogies that tie Europe to Africa in mutually dialectic ways. Focusing on the case of Senegal, this article aims to disrupt the ‘migrant as slave’ narrative by looking back at the histories of regional and international mobility that continue to shape population movements out of Senegal today.

Keywords: human trafficking, irregular migration, Senegal, Frontex, securitisation, slave traders

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Introduction

In recent years, migration from Africa to Europe has gained widespread global attention. The seemingly endless wave of overloaded boats crossing the Mediterranean has been portrayed as a full-scale humanitarian crisis, with over

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5,000 dead at sea in 2016.¹ The fact that people would be forced to risk their lives to migrate is frequently blamed on the presence of human smugglers and traffickers, whose criminality is uncritically assumed.² Indeed, in 2015, Italy's foreign minister, Paolo Gentiloni, characterised smugglers as '21st-century slave traders'.³ Framing migration facilitators as absolute criminals and migrants as consummate victims overlooks the extent to which border controls and enforcement policies have created the conditions of risk and illegality through which both facilitators and migrants must navigate.⁴ This article asks what it means to call migration facilitators modern-day 'slave traders'. Is this an accurate assessment? And what can history tell us about such framings?

This article examines how Senegalese migrations—both regionally in West Africa and across the Mediterranean to Europe—are historically profound. It explores the interrelated evolution of immigration policies that were integral to national political projects and discourses on nationhood in both France and Senegal in the mid-twentieth century, and in European Union states and Senegal in the late twentieth century. It also attends to more recent militarised campaigns mobilised to combat 'irregular' movements within and out of West Africa. That migratory patterns have been evolving over time suggests that there is something of a historical continuity that ties Europe to Africa in meaningful ways. More recent immigration laws, and the border enforcements they underwrite, are not immutable and self-evident, but should be seen as the product of internal and external political dynamics both in African and European contexts. Appreciating

¹ Mortality estimates should be approached cautiously, as the real death toll is likely much higher. See: T Brian and F Laczko (eds.), *Fatal Journeys: Tracking lives lost during migration*, International Organization for Migration, Geneva, 2014. Though fewer migrants arrived in Europe in 2016 (arrivals were down to 363,348 from over 1 million in 2015), the death toll was significantly higher (5,079 in 2016 as compared to 3,771 in 2015). See: International Organization for Migration, 'IOM counts 3,771 migrant fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015', 5 January 2016, <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015> and 'Mediterranean migrant arrivals top 363,348 in 2016; Deaths at sea: 5,079', 6 January 2017, <https://www.iom.int/news/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-top-363348-2016-deaths-sea-5079>.

² See: UNODC, 'Smuggling of Migrants: The harsh search for a better life', <https://www.unodc.org/toc/en/crimes/migrant-smuggling.html>.

³ K Sciff, 'A Smuggler's Haven in the Sahara', *The Washington Post*, 20 July 2015, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/world/2015/07/20/a-remote-city-of-smugglers/>.

⁴ L Achilli and G Sanchez, 'What does it mean to disrupt the business models of people smugglers?', Policy Brief, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Fiesole, April 2017.

the historical variability of human movements out of West Africa, and the extent to which they have become increasingly criminalised, disrupts the dominant narrative of facilitated migration as a 'modern-day slave trade' by highlighting how changing politics have actually created the conditions for clandestine migration facilitation to flourish.

Early Histories of Mobility, 1500-1900

Mobility has been a central feature of West African societies for centuries. Political historian Boubacar Barry attributes this mobility, at least in part, to the region's physical geography.⁵ Demarcated by the Senegal River in the north and the Gambia River to the south, with a vast semi-arid basin in between, the Northern Senegambia region was something of an agricultural granary and commercial crossroads during the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. The large rivers functioned as riparian highways along which goods and people were shuttled back and forth from the coast to the hinterlands. As such, pre-colonial Senegambia was characterised as a 'terminus for incoming populations and a point of departure for migrants on the move'.⁶

Various ethnic groups used regional mobility as a way to survive. Having already migrated north from the Futa Jallon region in modern-day Guinea, the Soninke of the Senegal River Valley pursued a combination of livelihood strategies that often necessitated varying degrees of mobility.⁷ Agricultural calendars revolved around the monsoon season lasting from June to September, which meant that during the dry season people could engage in temporary labour and trading activities. The subsequent pattern of alternating sedentary and mobile labour resulted in episodic but established cyclical movements in the region. Not only was the Soninke homeland located between the commercially vibrant Saharan zone and the Senegal River basin, it encompassed the actual river itself, which accommodated floating trading stations that facilitated the transport of grain and groundnut harvests through the region. Across the river, Arabo-Berber pastoralists migrated from the Saharan littorals to the river in the dry season to graze their herds and trade livestock for sorghum and millet.⁸

⁵ B Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ F Manchuelle, *Willing Migrants: Soninke labor diasporas, 1848–1960*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1997.

⁸ R Austen, *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010, p. 8.

Up until the fifteenth century, trade, and the mobility that enabled it, was oriented primarily inland towards the Sahara, which shuttled gold, salt, slaves and knowledge across the desert and connected the Mediterranean to sub-Saharan worlds.⁹ In the middle of the fifteenth century, trade shifted to encompass maritime routes consisting primarily of the exchange of slaves and gum arabic for European commodities. With the French abolition of the maritime slave trade in 1848, groundnut exports provided a profitable alternative to the trade in humans.¹⁰ Again, this required a relatively mobile labour force as people migrated inland during the rainy season to cultivate cash crops. French colonial authorities also frequently recruited ‘security officers’ from Senegal to ensure its imperial interests in other parts of Africa.¹¹ At the same time, people regularly used relocation as a way to evade colonial administrators, military conscription, and forced labour.¹² In the upper Senegal River valley, populations were known to disappear into the proverbial bush when colonial taxes and labour quotas became too onerous to bear.¹³ As such, mobility has been integral to Senegalese people’s survival for centuries.

The New Age of Migration, 1900-2000

Populations from the Senegal River valley (including Soninke, Serer, and Toucouleur ethnic groups) constituted the first wave of Senegalese immigrants to France in the early twentieth century. After World War I, Senegalese labourers were contracted to work as merchant marines on French commercial vessels, and later settled in places like Le Havre, Marseille and Bordeaux.¹⁴ The second and more substantial wave, which followed World War II and continued until 1970, consisted mainly

⁹ G Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic law, trade networks, and cross-cultural exchange in nineteenth-century western Africa*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2010.

¹⁰ J Irvine, ‘Caste and Communication in a Wolof Village’, Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1973, pp. 10–11.

¹¹ B Whitehouse, ‘Discrimination, Despoliation and Irreconcilable Difference: Host-immigrant tensions in Brazzaville-Congo’, *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2009, pp. 39–59.

¹² P Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, citizenship, and exclusion in Africa and Europe*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009, p. 77; J Roitman, ‘The Garrison-Entrepôt’, *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, vol. 38, no. 150/152, 1998, pp. 297–329.

¹³ A Clark, ‘Internal Migrations and Population Movements in the Upper Senegal Valley (West Africa), 1890–1920’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 3, 1994, p. 399–420.

¹⁴ R Willems, ‘Les “Fous de la Mer”: Les migrants clandestins du Sénégal aux îles Canaries en 2006’ in M-C Diop (ed.), *Le Sénégal des Migrations: Mobilités, identités et sociétés*, Karthala Press, Paris, 2008, pp. 277–303, p. 280.

of students and veterans. Before going on to occupy administrative and civil service posts in the political bureaucracy after independence, Senegalese students were often sent first to the metropole for university education.¹⁵ Former *tirailleurs Sénégalais* (colonial infantry), who had fought in both world wars on the side of the French, also migrated to work in the automobile and construction industry in the metropole after demobilisation.¹⁶

This international mobility was partly a result of the fact that, in the middle of the twentieth century, France was faced with a demographic challenge: in addition to a declining birth rate and an ageing population, many young soldiers had been killed during the two successive world wars. Setting their sights on industrial recovery, which would require significant labour power, France turned to its colonies. As part of post-war reconstruction, migrants from across francophone Africa were courted to work in French industries and on infrastructure projects. Known as the *Trente Glorieuses*, or Thirty Glories, the three decades after the war saw the dirigiste revitalisation of France's economy, which was made possible, in part, by the importation of cheap labour from North and West Africa. The 'economic logic'¹⁷ of immigration legislation between 1945 and 1973 enabled France to remedy its domestic labour shortage by extracting labour from the colonies. France established official recruitment centres in eight foreign countries, one of which was Senegal. According to French census data, the number of sub-Saharan Africans (mostly from Senegal and Mali) working in France increased from 17,787 in 1962 to over 80,000 in 1975.¹⁸ The 'Renault-Dakar office' thus became a euphemistic expression for the massive recruitment of Senegalese labourers to work in the automotive industry.

Even after Senegal's independence in 1960, France continued, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to encourage labour migration from the former colony. It was not until the oil crisis of 1973, and the beginning of economic recession, that France

¹⁵ Promising students had been migrating to France long before 1945, however. Blaise Diagne, for example, the first black African to be elected to the French National Assembly in 1914, was educated in Aix-en-Provence.

¹⁶ G Mann, *Native Sons: West African veterans and France in the twentieth century*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2006.

¹⁷ K Wadia, 'France: From unwilling host to bellicose gatekeeper' in G Dale and M Cole (eds.), *The European Union and Migrant Labour*, Berg Press, New York, 1999, pp. 171–202, p. 172.

¹⁸ N Robin, R Lalou and M Ndiaye, *Facteurs d'Attraction et de Répulsion à l'Origine des Flux Migratoires Internationaux: Rapport national Sénégal*, IRD Éditions, Bondy, 2000, p. 34. Gregory Mann points out that figures diverged greatly, with some independent sources reporting 50,000–60,000 West African workers in France in 1963, and between 200,000 and 250,000 only six years later in 1969. See: G Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sabel: The road to nongovernmentality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, p. 130.

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would reconsider its open-door policy when it came to immigrant labour. That year, France abandoned its worker recruitment programmes,¹⁹ though it was not until 1986 that Senegalese citizens were required to obtain an entry visa before travelling to France.²⁰ Family reunification schemes reshaped what had been a circular form of labour migration—in which Senegalese workers periodically returned home—into a permanent form of immigration and settlement. What this meant in practical terms for aspiring migrants was that unless they knew someone in France who could sponsor their visa application under the rubric of family reunification, legal pathways to Europe were suddenly, and very drastically, limited.

The reasons for this development were multiple. The ‘turning point’ in French immigration policy was not simply a matter of economic crisis brought on by the oil embargo, but part of a longer process of restructuring that had been taking place in the federal bureaucracy.²¹ France was in the midst of redefining its sovereignty as a member of the still-nascent European Economic Community (EEC), which required a political and economic re-orientation towards Europe and away from the former colonies. As Sylvan Laurens writes, ‘The decision [to close the borders] was the product of profound transformations of the [French] state apparatus which placed certain agents in a position to defend the “necessary” idea of controlling migrant flows [which had been in place] since the end of the 1960s.’²² At the same time, French racism, ‘exacerbated by everyday interactions including competition for housing in the 1920s and beyond’, led to growing hostility towards immigrant ‘others’.²³ Unrest among West African migrant workers in the metropole whose rent and labour strikes in the early 1960s publicised their deplorable living conditions and disrupted French business was also exploited by those pushing for immigration controls.²⁴

One often neglected factor in histories of twentieth-century labour migration to Europe is the role played by West African states like Senegal in policy design with regard to migration control post-independence. And yet as Gregory Mann points out, immigration reform was not simply a unilateral decision that was handed

¹⁹ V Guiraudon, ‘Immigration Policy in France’, *Brookings Institute*, 1 July 2001, retrieved 8 August 2017, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2001/07/0101france-guiraudon>.

²⁰ E Vickstrom, ‘Pathways into Irregular Status among Senegalese Migrants in Europe’, *International Migration Review*, vol. 48, no. 4, 2014, pp. 1062–1099.

²¹ S Laurens, “1974” et la Fermeture de Frontières: Analyse critique d’une décision érigée en turning-point’, *Politix*, issue 21, no. 82, 2008, pp. 69–94.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²³ I Law, *Mediterranean Racisms: Connections and complexities in the racialization of the Mediterranean region*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 28.

²⁴ Mann, pp. 145–161.

down *fait accompli* to former colonies. Rather, it was also the result of African states like Senegal negotiating the project of nation-building in the era of decolonisation by claiming its citizens as members in its national polity.²⁵

Against this impulse, however, several political, economic, and demographic factors combined to ensure that migration remained an attractive option for many Senegalese from the 1960s onwards. First, between 1960 and 1988, the population in Senegal more than doubled.²⁶ At the same time, the elimination of French subsidies on groundnut imports in 1967/1968 dealt a serious blow to Senegalese farmers, their households, and the national economy.²⁷ The late 1960s also marked the beginning of what would become a multi-decadal drought in the Sahel, further crippling the groundnut economy and leaving many families to seek work in urban centres. Declining exports and the global economic recession due to the oil crisis of the 1970s meant that Senegal had little choice but to accept the conditions attached to foreign structural adjustment loans,²⁸ which exacerbated unemployment, disenfranchised a class of civil servants in urban centres, privatised industry, devalued the currency, deregulated markets, and resulted in wild fluctuations in GDP growth.²⁹

For everyday people, quotidian existence became more difficult to ensure. One way to manage such economic volatility was to do what the Senegalese had always done: migrate elsewhere for work. While Senegalese labourers had been going to other African countries for decades, the economic crisis at home only increased

²⁵ Mann, p. 143. See also: A Sayad, 'Immigration et "Pensée d'État"', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, vol. 129, no. 1, 1999, pp. 5–14.

²⁶ G Pison *et al.* (eds.), *Population Dynamics of Senegal*, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1995, p. 30.

²⁷ A M Mbow, *Assises Nationales: Sénégal, an 50 bilan et perspectives de refondation*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011, p. 96. See also: C Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial authority and institutional choice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 131.

²⁸ Senegal became the first African state to receive a structural adjustment loan from the World Bank in 1979 as part of the Structural Adjustment 1 paradigm (SA 1). See: C Delgado, 'Africa's Changing Agricultural Development Strategies: Past and present paradigms as a guide to the future', *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. V, issue 1, 1998, pp. 175–214.

²⁹ Although Senegal's GDP growth rates did positively stabilise in the mid-1980s, such indicators do not necessarily reflect real living conditions for the majority of people because growth is often unevenly distributed. See: C Monga, 'Commodities, Mercedes-Benz and Structural Adjustment' in E K Akyeaamong (ed.), *Themes in West Africa's History*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2006, pp. 227–264; M Ravallion, 'Growth, Inequality and Poverty: Looking beyond averages', *World Development*, vol. 29, no. 11, 2001, pp. 1803–1815.

pressure to migrate for work during the 1980s and 1990s. Though France had been a major port of entry for Senegalese immigrants during the colonial period, it was not the only European country to attract Senegalese migrants in the postcolonial moment. Spain and Italy became major destinations for Senegalese on the move in the late twentieth century.

Unlike its northern neighbours, the Italian economy experienced rapid economic growth during the global recession of the 1970s. However, existing labour shortages meant that keeping a consistent flow of cheap labour from Africa was crucial to economic development. Thus Italy became a new destination for Senegalese migrants as early as the 1970s when its less restrictive immigration policies and demand for labour made it relatively easy to access.³⁰ In Spain, economic development looked slightly different, as Franco's death in 1975—which closely followed the first oil shock—marked the beginning of intense economic volatility. A period of rapid expansion followed, however, from 1986 to 1990, during which time semi- and low-skilled labour was in high demand to fuel the boom.

As a consequence, both Spain and Italy undertook periodic regularisations of irregular migrants, which meant that even if one had entered southern Europe illegally or overstayed a visa, many could still benefit from temporary residence and work permits as they became available.³¹ Between 1986 and 2002, five regularisation programmes were undertaken in Italy, which offered temporary work and residence permits to over 1.4 million applicants. Similarly in Spain between 1985 and 2005, six regularisation programmes were undertaken, offering at least half a million immigrants temporary residence, which was often renewable.³²

³⁰ Willems, p. 280. See also: K Calavita, *Immigrants at the Margins: Law, race, and exclusion in Southern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005. As of 2000, there were nearly as many Senegalese immigrants in Italy as in France. See: B Jettinger, 'Informal Remittance Systems in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries: Senegal country study', Research Report, ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, Oxford, 2005, p. 5.

³¹ J Arango and M Jachimowicz, 'Regularizing Immigrants in Spain: A new approach', *Migration Policy Institute*, 1 September 2005, retrieved 8 August 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/regularizing-immigrants-spain-new-approach>.

³² A Levinson, 'Why Countries Continue to Consider Regularization', *Migration Policy Institute*, 1 September 2005, retrieved 8 August 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/why-countries-continue-consider-regularization>; C Beauchemin *et al.*, 'From Senegal and Back: Trends and routes of migrants in times of restrictions', Working Paper 21, MAFE, 2014, p. 5; N O Pérez, 'Spain: Forging an immigration policy', *Migration Policy Institute*, 1 February 2003, retrieved 8 August 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/spain-forging-immigration-policy>.

At the same time, southern European countries were between something of a rock and a hard place. They recognised the value in improving relations with other EU member states. Seeking to curry good favour with Brussels, the Spanish government instituted visa requirements for all non-EEC immigrants in 1985, and later in 1986 was welcomed into the European Economic Community. Both Italy and Spain joined the Treaty of Schengen in 1990 and 1991, respectively, after which both Mediterranean countries had vested political and economic interests in maintaining Europe's external borders with Africa. According to William Baldwin-Edwards, '[S]outhern European countries are expected to bear the brunt of adjustment in restricting immigration into Europe, and are also the principal beneficiaries of EU Structural and other funds.³³ The struggle between the need for cheap imported labour from Africa and the need for funds from the EU would continue to influence Italian and Spanish immigration policies for decades to come.

Back in Senegal, as economic times grew more constricted, people responded quickly to such open, if ambivalent, immigration policies in southern Europe. Many of those migrants framed their mobility through the lens of the teachings of the politically influential Sufi Murid brotherhood,³⁴ and stories of its founding saint who resisted and evaded colonial control. Such stories infuse clandestine migration with an aura of religious sanction.³⁵ The Murid's valuation of hard work as the path to salvation also squares easily with opportunities to labour abroad, especially when the job opportunities in Senegal are so limited.

³³ M Baldwin-Edwards, 'The Emerging European Immigration Regime: Some reflections on implications for Southern Europe', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 35, no. 4, 1997, pp. 497–519, p. 506.

³⁴ C A Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 2007; J Copans, *Les Marabouts de l'Arachide: La confrérie mouride et les paysans de Sénégal*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1988; C Coulon, *Le Marabout et le Prince: Islam et pouvoir au Sénégal*, Éditions Pédone, Paris, 1981; D B Cruise O'Brien, *Saints and Politicians: Essays on the organisation of a Senegalese peasant society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975; M Diouf, 'The Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora and the Making of a Vernacular Cosmopolitanism', *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2000, pp. 679–702; V Ebin, 'A la Recherche de Nouveaux "Poissons": Stratégies commerciales mourides par temps de crise', *Politique Africaine*, no. 45, 1992, pp. 86–99.

³⁵ S Bava, 'De la "Baraka aux Affaires": Ethos économique-religieux et transnationalité chez les migrants Sénégalais mourides', *Revue Européenne de Migrations Internationales*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2003, pp. 69–84; J R Bowen, 'Beyond Migration: Islam as a transnational public space', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 30, no. 5, 2004, pp. 879–894; V Ebin, 'Making Room versus Creating Space: The construction of spatial categories by itinerant Mouride traders' in B D Metcalf (ed.), *Muslim Space in North America and Europe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, pp. 92–108, p. 98.

The Age of Securitisation, 2000-present

Established patterns of intracontinental migration out of Senegal shifted in the early 2000s, after growing xenophobia and regional conflicts broke out.³⁶ The two consecutive civil wars in Congo-Brazzaville from 1993–1995 and 1997–1999, and the 1999 coup and ensuing civil war in Côte d’Ivoire from 2002 to 2004 heralded a new era of regional unrest. As economic conditions in Senegal, and political situations elsewhere in Africa, deteriorated through the end of the twentieth century, more and more young people came to see Europe as a beacon of fiscal, political, and moral security. While some scholars assert that Senegal continues to send more migrants to other sub-Saharan countries than to the EU,³⁷ a more recent analysis reveals that from 1975 to 2008 the number of Senegalese migrating to other African countries decreased steadily, while migration to Europe increased from forty to sixty per cent.³⁸ Those who had the good fortune to travel and find work in Europe were idolised in popular stories and proverbs that began circulating widely in Senegal. In the Senegal River valley, sayings include: ‘The Haalpulhar [ethnic group] know where they were born but not where they will be buried.’ Among the Wolof, it is often said: ‘He who does not travel will never know where it is best to live.’³⁹ For those who lacked family or religious connections to Europe, one of the only alternatives was to attempt to migrate clandestinely.

Between 2005 and 2008, tens of thousands of Senegalese migrants attempted to cross the Atlantic in wooden pirogues heading for the Canary Islands.⁴⁰ In 2006 alone, over 40,000 arrived on the Spanish archipelago.⁴¹ Departing from Senegalese

³⁶ F Gubert, ‘Migrant Remittances and their Impact on Development in the Home Economies: The case of Africa’ in *Migration, Remittances and Development*, OECD Press, Paris, 2005, pp. 41–63, p. 42.

³⁷ J Schoorl *et al.*, *Push and Pull Factors of International Migration: A comparative report*, EUROSTAT, Brussels, 2000, p. 78.

³⁸ B Schoumaker *et al.*, ‘Changing Patterns of African Migration: A comparative analysis’, MAFE Working Paper 18, INED, Paris, 2013, p. 12.

³⁹ N Ndiaye, ‘Senegalese Values and Other Cultural Push Factors behind Migration and Return’, *International Commentary*, vol. 10, no. 35, 2014, pp. 41–45; S M Tall and A Tandian, ‘Regards sur la Migration Irrégulière des Sénégalais: Vouloir faire fortune avec des pirogues de fortune’, Research Report, CARIM-AS 2010/50, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, Fiesole, 2010.

⁴⁰ Up until the 1990s, most boat migration to Europe consisted mainly of Moroccans travelling to Spain across the Strait of Gibraltar. At the time, such movements were legal as North African nationals were not required to obtain a visa to enter Spain.

⁴¹ P D Fall, *Sénégal: Migration, marché de travail et développement*, Working Paper, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 2010, p. 31.

shores en masse and overloaded with passengers, these coastal fishing vessels were often no match for Atlantic swells. An untold number perished in the 1,500-kilometre crossing, and of those who did arrive safely, many suffered from dysentery, exposure, and dehydration. At the time, images and stories of these traumatised migrants circulated widely in the press. In an attempt to halt the ‘flood’ landing on the Canary Islands, the EU expanded maritime patrols off the coast of Senegal, largely through Frontex operations, which effectively crippled the western Atlantic route to Europe.⁴²

Again, however, border control directives were not simply European campaigns dictated unilaterally from Brussels. The Senegalese state also had a vested interest in managing migration flows. If claiming one’s citizens were part of the nation-building project for Senegal in the mid-twentieth century, the state later saw additional fiscal advantages for controlling the movement of its populations in the twenty-first. Senegal conducted a series of important financial and diplomatic accords with the EU and member states which increasingly tied the allocation of development aid to issues of migration control. Bilateral accords were signed with France (2006 and 2008), Spain (2006 and 2007), and Italy (2008), which stipulated the concerted management of migration flows, including the readmission of Senegalese nationals, in exchange for development aid. These agreements signalled a confluence of often contradictory political and economic agendas. On the one hand, southern European countries—Italy and Spain—had been facing enormous political pressure to be the new ‘gatekeepers’ for Fortress Europe since the 1980s. On the other hand, they needed cheap, often informal migrant labour from the developing world in order to keep their economies running. For this reason, their own immigration policies were often revised with ‘dizzying frequency’.⁴³

At the same time, these accords also signalled how Senegal was able to deftly mobilise its skills as a ‘flexible gatekeeper’ on the global stage in order to consolidate power at home.⁴⁴ In regulating migration to Europe in exchange for development

⁴² Created in 2004, Frontex is the external border management arm of the European Union and has played a major role in crippling clandestine naval routes to Europe by both stopping journeys before they begin in Senegal and by policing the North African coast and the Mediterranean Sea before arrival at their destination. Like Frontex, Spain’s Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior (SIVE) has been another effective border control mechanism. By positioning highly sophisticated surveillance technologies off the Spanish coast, boats were detected and intercepted earlier and thus fewer pirogues were able to make it to European shores. See: J Carling, ‘The Merits and Limitations of Spain’s High-tech Border Control’, *Migration Information Source*, 7 June 2007, retrieved 8 August 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/merits-and-limitations-spains-high-tech-border-control>.

⁴³ Calavita, *Immigrants at the Margins*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ F Cooper, *Africa Since 1940: The past of the present*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 180.

aid, the Senegalese state has been able ‘to sit astride the interface between [its] territory and the rest of the world, collecting and distributing resources that derived from the gate itself’.⁴⁵ By managing the circulation of its citizens, and directly benefitting from their expulsions, the Senegalese state was able to extract rents not as its citizens left the gate, but as they *re-entered* it.

Though many state officials, as well as some scholars, optimistically declared in 2009 that boat migration out of Senegal was over, what happened was that rather than stopping migration, patrols simply redirected it. As one repatriated boat migrant in Senegal put it to me, ‘With Frontex, migration just moves elsewhere.’⁴⁶ From the moment that Frontex implemented Operation Hera in 2005, migratory routes began shifting overland to journeys across the Sahara to North Africa where, it was rumoured, one could buy passage across the Mediterranean from departure points in Libya. In this way, border controls can actually create what Martin Lemberg-Pedersen calls ‘border-induced displacement’.⁴⁷ When the West African route was shut down, migrants already on the move re-directed their transit across the Sahara. For Lemberg-Pedersen, contemporary borders ‘do not preempt migration by halting it at fixed points... [Rather, they] transform migration into... border-induced displacement.’⁴⁸ Rather than stopping movement, border securitisation, not presumed ‘slave traders’, forces prospective Senegalese and other West African migrants to take more circuitous and thus more dangerous routes.

Conclusion

Senegalese people have been migrating for centuries, but for them, the condition of ‘irregularity’ is a very recent political construction.⁴⁹ In the twentieth century, French worker recruitment programmes actively courted Senegalese labourers throughout the post-war period. Prior to 1986 when France began requiring entry visas for Senegalese nationals,⁵⁰ ‘irregular’ Senegalese migration was practically and conceptually ‘non-existent’.⁵¹ Migration out of Senegal has a long and profound

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴⁶ Personal interview, Dakar, Senegal, 2013.

⁴⁷ M Lemberg-Pedersen, ‘Effective Protection or Effective Combat? EU border control and North Africa’ in P Gaibazzi, A Bellagamba, and S Dünwald (eds.), *EurAfrican Borders and Migration Management: Political cultures, contested spaces, and ordinary lives*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2017, pp. 29–61, p. 54.

⁴⁸ Lemberg-Pedersen, p. 55.

⁴⁹ K Calavita, ‘Immigration, Law, and Marginalization in a Global Economy: Notes from Spain’, *Law and Society Review*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1998, pp. 529–566; N De Genova, ‘Migrant “Illegality” and Deportability in Everyday Life’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 31, 2002, pp. 419–447.

⁵⁰ Vickstrom, p. 1067.

⁵¹ Beauchemin *et al.*, p. 23.

history, and it is recent policies that have effectively rendered such movements, and the people who undertake them, illegal, and thus more vulnerable to exploitation.

Despite their ‘illegality’, Senegalese migrants were able to use their personal networks to access facilitators whom they knew and could trust in the mid-2000s. Though such journeys to the Canary Islands were sometimes tragic, migrants often knew their facilitators and boat captains first-hand and could trust that they operated within the same social universe. After Frontex, their journeys traversed more socially remote geographies through the Sahara, which meant they had to rely on people with whom they were less familiar, and who could potentially take advantage of them without recourse to social protections.

With this history in mind, what does it mean to call migration facilitators ‘modern-day slave traders’? Is this an accurate assessment? I argue that ‘slavery’ is not an accurate term to characterise Senegalese migrants who engage in mobility; for them it is part of a long-standing historical and religious practice. Though they do face increasing exploitation along their journeys to Europe, such as being kidnapped, being held for ransom, or literally being sold by depraved people, this development is due to the fact that border securitisation has made safe entry an impossibility for most. In addition, marking African migrants as ‘slaves’ further reinforces a racial calculus that sees black Africans as inferior and thus necessarily subject to enslavement.

Interestingly, though the language of migration control in the early 2000s insinuated a link between migration and terrorism, today what we see is an increasing victimisation of the migrant subject. As such, the blame is often levelled against migration facilitators, who allegedly use and abuse their human ‘cargo’ for quick profits. It has become common in media and policy reports to suggest that irregular migrants the world over are manipulated into departure by greedy and unscrupulous human smugglers who do not fully disclose the dangers of passage, and who take advantage of passive or gullible migrants. Consequently, Europe’s mission to police its borders becomes a humanitarian project to ‘protect’ the vulnerable migrant.

Along with EUNAVFOR-MED’s Operation Sophia, which seeks to dismantle the ‘business model’ of migration facilitation, just last year EUROPOL launched the European Migrant Smuggling Center in an effort to ‘[tackle] the sophisticated international... smuggling networks... that exploit the desperation and vulnerability of migrants’.⁵² And the mission is vast. Tracking down and immobilising the ‘40,000 individual smugglers’,⁵³ is not only practically ambitious; it also frames

⁵² EUROPOL, ‘Migrant Smuggling in the EU’, EUROPOL Public Information Report, 2016, p. 2. See also: Europol, ‘Europol Launches the European Migrant Smuggling Centre’, 22 February 2016, https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/EMSC_launch.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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intervention as a humanitarian response. Playing on the ‘care and control duality of humanitarianism’,⁵⁴ police interventions ‘control’ the national borders while ‘caring’ for the vulnerable migrant who is presumably exploited by criminal thugs. Such discourses do not merely license restriction; they *produce* truths about the way migration works. In a rather simplistic arithmetic, stopping the smuggler stops the migrant from heading down a dangerous path filled with thieves, extortionists, rapists, drug lords, prostitution kingpins, violent murderers, and ‘slave traders’. Increased military patrols, then, are presumably mobilised in the migrant’s best interest. And yet migration facilitation is not a result of criminality, but is the consequence of increasingly limited options for legal mobility among populations for whom migration is a culturally meaningful and long-standing historical practice.

Today, Senegalese migration across the Mediterranean is far from over. It is at the front of international debates on border control, humanitarian intervention, and national sovereignty. The Mediterranean Sea has become both an artery and a graveyard for many departing the shores of North Africa in search of a better life. In 2016, over 181,000 migrants arrived in Italy, most of whom were sub-Saharan Africans.⁵⁵ And though outnumbered by Nigerian and Eritrean citizens, Senegalese migrants are among the top ten nationalities to arrive in Italy.⁵⁶ Such numbers tend to flash across television screens and newspaper headlines in a way that reinforces the sense that such migrations are coming ‘out of nowhere’, and that they are criminally motivated. But news cycles tend to forget previous migrations and the confluence of factors that inspired and shaped them. For Senegalese migrants, the Mediterranean route is but the newest path in a long line of trajectories that have been shifting across land and water for years. In the final analysis, higher border security generally correlates with higher potential for exploitation. Such an assessment disrupts the idea that migrants are victims to depraved and immoral ‘slave traders’. Rather, Senegalese migrants are continuing to adapt to increasingly securitised borders as a way to survive.

⁵⁴ P Pallister-Wilkins, ‘The Humanitarian Politics of European Border Policing: Frontex and border police in Evros’, *International Political Sociology*, vol. 9, issue 1, 2015, pp. 53–69, p. 54.

⁵⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Mediterranean Situation*, <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/country.php?id=105>.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

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