GIMAAA Group

Introduction

In this chapter, we propose to present the paths walked as a research team since 1990, when we formed a heterogeneous and diverse group in terms of age, gender, personality and academic training, today called the Research Group on African Migrations and Afro-descendants in Argentina (GIMAAA)[13]. Intellectually and affectively involved in our work, a fruitful atmosphere was created for brainstorming, giving rise to a context of reciprocity from the passion that joined us - research into migratory groups located in the province of Buenos Aires. Our physical workspace was established in the Migratory Movements section of the Ethnography Division of the Museum of Natural Sciences of La Plata National University (UNLP). In the early stages of our work, much of the focus was on sourcing funding to enable us to carry out the research. In the following sections, we will outline the periodization of the work carried out, taking account of the study's central axes and the theoretical-methodological approach developed by the group.

Stage One: Cartography of migrants in the Province of Buenos Aires

In 1997, we obtained an initial grant from the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), to develop the project '*Construction of a sociocultural database on immigrants and their descendants (with the exception of Spaniards and Italians), located*

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[13] Nowadays the GIMAAA consists of Marta M. Maffia (anthropologist), Bernarda Zubrzycki (anthropologist), Ana Cristina Ottenheimer (anthropologist), Paola Monkevicius (anthropologist), María Luz Espiro (anthropologist), Sonia Voscoboinik (psychologist), Nicolás Herrera (sociologist) and Rocío de la Canal (geographer).

in the province of Buenos Aires (Argentina)'. The following year we received funding from the National Agency for Scientific and Technological Promotion (ANPCyT), which allowed us to continue with the project. The work was guided by two general objectives: (a) to map and identify the associative tendencies in different Buenos Aires municipalities and (b) to characterize the sociocultural profile of the mapped migratory populations/groups. This project represented an unprecedented survey in the field of research on migration in Argentina[14].

The resulting cartography gave rise to a general map of location and distribution of the different immigrant communities and their descendants in the province, breaking down into 46 location maps for each group and their associations in the selected municipalities. We also obtained a significant amount of photographic and documentary material, resulting from field work.

The greatest methodological challenge at this early stage was that of problematizing, in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way, the plurality of collected information. It consisted of both quantitative material, which was obtained through traditional methods, mainly surveys, and qualitative material constructed from ethnographic work with techniques such as observation with different degrees of participation, interviews, and life stories. It also included information obtained from census analyses and written documentation, resulting from trips and correspondence. Some results of what was produced in the articulated instances of field and laboratory work were published in the book *Where are the immigrants? Sociocultural mapping of immigrant groups and their descendants in the Province of Buenos Aires* (Maffia 2002).

The conclusions of this first stage of work are still valuable to us, despite the time that has elapsed since obtaining and analyzing the empirical material. In addition, they represented a starting point that allowed us to identify research elements that

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[14]Since the province of Buenos Aires has a total area of 307,571 km2 and has 135 municipalities.

were emerging as significant. For instance, within the organisations we identified the growth of tension and conflict in relationships. There were numerous differences among members, especially in terms of capitals (economic, social, cultural, educational, militant). There were issues around hierarchical structures and generational and gender problems, which produced a conflictive asymmetry of power. Among those in leadership positions, we perceived a great resistance to change, while the young pro-active men and women who were emerging, were more militant and had very different management styles. A novel issue with regard to the diversity of the Argentinian migratory groups is, that in the 1990s, immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa (Senegalese, Nigerians, Cameroonians, and others) began to arrive in the country, although in non-significant numbers. However, they aroused our interest and led us to the formulation of several projects that included them as key empirical references.

Stage Two: From sub-Saharan African migration to 'Afro-descendant' presence.

In the second stage of work, our aim was to explore the main historiographic, socio-anthropological, and demographic backgrounds of the African origin population, and to review some of the field observations that were more significant and suggestive to us. Before going any further, it is important to note that those representations of the collective imaginary, permeated by the belief of an ethnically homogeneous and racially white Argentina, were established from a work of cultural engineering resulting from the beginning of the national construction process. This 'absence' of diversity is the product of a particular otherness formation (Segato 2007), characterized by the 'ethnic terror' that would have given rise to a deliberate political will to eliminate any 'way of being the other', putting pressure on ethnically marked people so that they would move from their categories of origin, through formal and informal mechanisms of persuasion, distortion and even extermination. With reference to Africans and their descendants specifically, Segato adds that:

the disappearance of the black in Argentina was ideologically, culturally, and literally constructed rather than strictly demographic (...) their presence was first excluded from the official representation that the nation gave itself (2007: 255).

On the other hand, Frigerio (2008) argues that, together with the existence of a dominant narrative of nation that emphasizes whiteness, there is a system of racial classification that invisibilises the black on a daily basis. He claims that both these factors, added to certain theoretical frameworks once in vogue, have conditioned academic research in such a way, that most of it carried out during the twentieth century focused on the topic of slaves and free blacks between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Our group has worked on this invisibility problem with respect to African migrants from the Cape Verde[15] archipelago, during the first half of the 20th century. Cape Verdeans, following the tradition of other immigrants who arrived in the country, organized themselves into mutual aid associations and both natives and their descendants were active participants in a process of 'Argentinization', when promoting an identity strategy within the group, characterized mainly by the 'invisibilization' of the African component.

Regarding the observations, resulting from the field work of that decade, we registered that some Cape Verdean immigrants and their descendants, along with other Afro-Argentinians, began to develop political strategies of Africanity recognition, beginning a growing process of visibility This temporarily coincided with the migration to Argentina, as we have already mentioned, of groups of Africans from Senegal, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Mali, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Guinea, among others[16].

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[15] In particular, Dr. Marta Maffia, who has taken them as a research reference since the late 1970s.

[16] In the last census of 2010, 2,738 Africans were registered out of a total of 1,805,957 foreigners, representing only 0.15%. It is possible that an

Consequently, during this stage, we broadened our field of observation and analysis from sub-Saharan African migration to 'Afro-descendant' presences. The latter included descendants of Cape Verdeans born in Argentina, Afro-Argentinians (descendants of the enslaved brought to the River Río de La Plata), those from other Latin American and Caribbean countries, such as Afro-Cubans, Afro-Peruvians, Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Uruguayans, Afro-Colombians, and Haitians, among others.

Based on these migrant dynamics in Argentina, and their relationship with the new visibilities of Afro-descendants located in the province of Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (CABA), we developed two new projects, financed by CONICET and the Education Ministry of the Nation. Our aim with these projects was to learn about migratory trajectories; representations and construction of memories; forms of organisation; and delimitation, or construction, of ethnic borders between Afro-Argentinians and Africans, particularly the creation of an area of shared sociability. We wished to explore the relationships between the organisations formed by the first African migrants, such as Cape Verdeans, and those created by Afro-Argentinians and Afro-Latin Americans, This, while also analyzing their participation in the growing process of the Afro population visibilization, emphasizing the relationship established with the State and their regional and international connections. Finally, the projects focused on the problems related to discrimination and racism, political demands and collective actions led by certain activists in these struggles. Many outputs produced by the research team gave account of these issues, with varying degrees of depth. They were presented in periodical publications, books, congresses, and outreach activities.

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under-registration may have occurred due to several causes, such as entering the territory outside the current legal frameworks. For this reason, both the associations that group them and the community leaders estimate that there would be between four and five thousand sub-Saharan immigrants in Argentina, mainly Senegalese.

Stage Three: New visibilities and legal frameworks in the 2000s.
The next stage was characterized by the combination, and examination, of two research experiences which had been carried out in the same academic unit of the UNLP. One was concerned with Africans and Afro-descendants and took place at the Ethnography Division. The other, led by Dr. Liliana Tamagno and located at the Social Anthropology Research Laboratory, was concerned with indigenous urban migrants from the Argentinian Chaco. Thus, we expanded our interdisciplinary team by integrating researchers from Anthropology, and graduates of Political, Legal and Communication Sciences.

We took account of substantial previous research, both our own and that of other colleagues that affirmed the denial, invisibility and silencing of the indigenous and Afro-descendant component within the Argentinian population. We then paid attention to the new visibilities of these groups produced in recent years, whose demands reached, to a greater or lesser extent, the status of state policies. There are significant challenges that arise when attempts are made to translate such demands into public policies. The book, *Indigenous, African, and Afro-descendant people in Argentina. Convergences, divergences and challenges* (Tamagno and Maffia 2014), summarizes the main results of the research work carried out by both teams.

Stage Four: New otherness, visibilities, and relationships
Upon completion of this collective project, we observed new dynamics in some organisations of African migrants and Afro-descendants, which led us to focus again on our particular issue. We focused on aspects that needed to be deepened and problematized, such as associationism, transnationalism, social representations, social memory processes, social networks, ethnic identities, social movements, the formation of communities and diasporas, among others. Consequently, we moved on to the next stage of the research (2013-2016), with two projects aimed at delving into the '*New otherness, visibilities and relationships between organisations of sub-Saharan African migrants and Afro-descendants in the province of Buenos Aires and CABA*'.

Some members of the research group pointed to the Senegalese migrants, because they represent the majority of the collective of sub-Saharan African migrants who have become transnational agents between regions, linking new spaces of life mainly with the societies of origin. Other researchers in the team mostly referenced their work, though not exclusively, on Afro-descendants, emphasizing their political actions; creating associative and organisational spaces; mobilizing in the fight against discrimination and racism; vindicating blackness and self-representation. In the same way, the research was aimed at achieving the main objectives proposed in the projects, analyzing the processes of material and symbolic territorialization, expressed in the formation of associations and in the creation and recreation of shared social spaces, in the struggle for citizenship broadening. Also, our goals were to delve into the role played by African migrants in the visibilization processes of the Afro-descendant population of and in, Argentina, to analyze the social representations of the local society about Afro-descendants and African migrants, such as they are expressed publicly through the media, blogs, web pages, etc., and to understand the role of social memory processes and uses of the past as diacritics of ethnic marking/visibilization in both groups.

From the studies carried out during this stage, we chose nine works, which became chapters of a collective book called *Africans and Afro-descendants in Argentina. Practices, representations, and memories* (Maffia and Zubrzycki, coord. 2017). Ideas expressed in previous stages were included in that book, for instance, in relation to the organisations that group Afro-descendants and Africans. Although, at the beginning, they were created as an area of organized shared sociability, and an anchoring space for the construction of identifications based on shared origins and diasporic affiliations, we observed growing tensions and conflicts in internal relationships and between different groups. From the interaction between them, with the national State and other transnational actors, a variety of interests and points of view that collided with each other arose, making it difficult to carry out a unified project. These situations only express the diversity and dynamics of the relationships among social actors, of which the

conflict is part, albeit silenced for centuries. Later, we observed that many of these tensions were diluted with the creation of alliances between some organisations and their leaders, who constructed their own paths, 'parallel ones' that were, in some way, implicitly excluding. But we also observed, as a result of a deep follow-up in our field work, that in very specific circumstances, they converged in shared spaces.

Other chapters focused on the trajectories of the Senegalese migrants in Argentina and neighboring countries, how they were formed from accumulated experiences and social ties, interwoven with numerous actors from the group itself and from the host societies. All these accumulated capitals allowed them to shape, and update, solutions to certain conflicts in specific situations, which have developed even within the Southern Cone[17], and to favor the consolidation of transnational mobility and workspaces. In the book, we have also addressed the way in which state control and institutional racism in Argentina are faced, from the practices of some Senegalese migrants, based on the analysis of cases. Through this process, we were able to identify how these migrants were able to use strategic and non-disruptive methods to influence State, NGOs, academia, and media to channel their demands and improve their situation in the country.

The research also focused on the formation of associative groups, organisations and spaces for interaction with Afro-descendants and African migrants and on the actions of their leaders as authorized voices, in the process of giving meaning to the sub-othered memories. Specifically, we analyzed commemorative spaces as privileged supports in the reconstruction of Afro memories, observing agreements, conflicts, and disputes in the discursive scenario, crossed by power relations.

Accompaniment, ethnographic ethics, and involvement

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[17] Geopolitical region made up of the countries of Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil and Peru, although the inclusion of territories may vary.

Throughout our research, crystallized in these and other bibliographic productions, the team members carried out the less visible work of accompaniment of the groups with which we constructed knowledge. On various occasions, conflictive situations arose between these groups and local security forces, government and the media, with illegitimate action of these institutions in workplaces, public roads and, occasionally, in the migrant groups' homes. This process of accompaniment is one that follows the ethical guidelines leading the ethnographic work. It is based on the conviction that working with other social subjects implies a commitment to find collective solutions to situations of oppression and inequality. In our case, it is about the experiences of people of African descent in Argentina, particularly the Senegalese migrants.

Through this ethnographic framework, we participated with Senegalese referents in cross-sectoral workshops, such as the Observatory Board for the Migrants' Human Rights of the Center for Legal and Social Studies (2011-2012); similar spaces in the Ministry of Justice, Security and Human Rights of the Nation (2016); and in the Provincial Commission for Memory (2017-2018); where the claimants, with some success claimed for their systematically violated labor, migration, and citizens' rights.

Stage Five: Leaderships of African and Afro-descendant migrants

A major goal of our research projects has been to contribute to providing a response, if only partial, to a range of issues such as the complex insertion of migrants in the host society; the articulation through associations; the link between migrant and Afro-descendant associativism; the role of leaders and Afro activists in the demand for public policies; the restitution of citizen rights; the questioning of the 'official' story; and the irruption of new pasts and dynamics of Afro-state interaction. This involved focusing on the actions of those subjects with greater decision-making power, particularly within associative spaces, subjects who held a situation of power over the definition of meanings and practices, from institutionalized positions and from both formal and informal ones. This is how the leadership role of African and Afro-descendant migrants acquired centrality,

both within the institutional bond they represent, as well as in the configuration of 'policies of difference' (Restrepo 2013)[18].

Both the empirical data and a corpus of theoretical issues led us to some important and intertwined questions, such as: How and why do some subjects acquire a position of influence within the group? Are personal qualities, such as ambition and decision-making capacity, Max Weber's 'charisma' (1964) central? Is training, experience (associative, professional, political, oratory, etc.), the 'militant capital' (Matonti and Poupeau 2004), a factor of those occupying a prominent place in the choice? How do social factors and the 'structure of opportunities' fit? How is the collective bond with the institutional project they represent produced? Some of these questions gave rise to new team projects about the construction and configuration of leadership in the African and Afro-descendant populations in the province of Buenos Aires and CABA[19]. In this sense, we understood leadership, not as a static phenomenon as it was traditionally thought of in its early days, but rather as dynamic and relational, socially, culturally, and historically situated, and subject to power relations operating in the social context. This is a recent and developing line of research, novel in the field of migration anthropology in Argentina.

As discussed in Stage One, this research has allowed us to provisionally create a map where formal and informal organisations, individuals, NGOs, the State, etc. are represented. These bodies align, oppose, merge and divide, forming a complex relational scenario, with numerous tensions and dynamisms. it is there that we focused on the role of certain subjects whose performance on these dynamics was decisive.

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[18] Understood in a broad sense, it refers to the "grid of intelligibility that makes difference thinkable, thus giving it its historical existence and making certain positions possible." (2013: 159). Governments and state institutions, social movements, organisations, NGOs, the academic establishment, and expert knowledge take part there, as well as the dissimilar social imaginaries of the population.

[19] Financed by ANPCyT and CONICET.

Some of the first results, in particular those referring to Senegalese migrants, show us that their leaders play important roles in the migration context, standing out as the main interlocutors and mediators with state authorities, diplomats, NGOs, migrant organisations and media, among other actors. They are activists, committed to the rights of migrants, and also protagonists in the fight against racism in Argentina. Hence, they hold a central position when it comes to thinking about public policies that include them, and the need to generate knowledge about and together with them.

Likewise, we delved into the role of African migrant women in the associative dynamics and the possibility of assuming leadership positions, particularly through the association Unity is Strength', in Wolof[20] 'BokkNekkBenn'. This association was created as a *tontine*, a very frequent type of grouping among Senegalese women, both in the country of origin and in migratory contexts. It is made up of married women of the Wolof ethnic group who live mainly in the Province of Buenos Aires. The main objectives of this association have been to set up a collective saving system and access to financial aid and loans. It has also functioned as a space for listening and for emotional support among its members.

Participatory research and university extension processes
Continuing with the Senegalese migrant referent (between 2018 and 2020), we got involved in two processes of Participatory Action Research (PAR), as a 'study and action method (…) to obtain useful and reliable results in the improvement of collective situations, especially for the popular classes' (Fals Borda 2009: 320) and to engage in collaborative ethnographies[21], within the

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[20] Wolof is a language spoken in Senegal of the Niger-Congo family.
21 We incorporate the contributions of Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani (2018), who propose to transcend the individual ethnographic model by integrating construction practices of non-academic knowledge, to give centrality to the processes of political subjectivation and to care and emotions and finally, to deploy methodologies that transform and overflow research methods. And those of Rappaport (2021), when he

framework of two multi-sectoral assemblies in the City of La Plata. The establishment of these assemblies came about as a response to tensions between the Senegalese vendors and the government management of the City, especially the repression and systematic persecution of the group. The first assembly took place in 2018 and was self-entitled 'Assembly for the Rights of Migrant Workers'. Two years later 'Anti-racist Awareness' (Agite Antirracista) emerged. Some of the common objectives of both spaces were to build a non-criminalizing view of Senegalese workers (in general) and their referents (in particular); to create spaces in which their testimony was heard with a view to denouncing repression by the municipality and local and provincial police; and to promote spaces of political subjectivation for all the participants of both assembly meetings. In these organisations, inter-epistemological knowledge construction processes were developed, in which migrants, especially community referents, had a leading role in activities and decision-making, thus moving them beyond the frequently attributed, conceptualized roles of 'research objects' or 'key informants' (Fals Borda 1981). Other members of the assemblies were lawyers, researchers, civil organisation representatives, social workers, journalists, anthropologists, cultural workers, UNLP students, and independent individuals.

With regard to implemented activities of these bodies, in 2018, we, members of the 'Assembly for the Rights of Migrant Workers', conducted a municipal survey of Senegalese migrants. We put in place a bilingual protocol (Wolof/Spanish) regarding the arbitrary arrests of street workers and established workshops for the rights of Senegalese. A public presentation of the protocol was subsequently held in the city center (Voscoboinik and

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states that it is not possible to define PAR or collaborative ethnographies in a closed and complete way, because they emerge in particular work contexts.

Zubrzycki 2019). In 'Antiracist Awareness'[22] we recorded a 'Virtual Festival for the Rights of Senegalese Migrants in the City of La Plata'. We also recorded a cycle of interviews with testimonies of informal workers, who would be adversely affected by the implementation of a new code of coexistence in the city of La Plata[23].

Finally, during 2019, we participated in a University Extension project[24], aimed at working with the community outside of the University and the Academy. In this case, our action focused on holding meetings with high school students to reflect on concepts such as 'ethnic diversity' and 'racial diversity', among others.

As a conclusion

Throughout this work, it has been possible to observe how, despite personal interests and insertions within the academic field, we have managed to form an interdisciplinary research group, with an extensive and uninterrupted trajectory in the study field of the diversities of African origin in Argentina. Our different trainings within the field of human sciences (social anthropology, psychology, sociology, geography) have allowed us to develop an enriching dialogue, both within the group and

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[22] Anti-racist Awareness (Agite Antirracista) was the second self-convened assembly that was formed to address the problems of Senegalese migrants. It developed activities during the pandemic. Three Senegalese referents participated in the meetings, although one of them played a central role as community leader in decision-making in relation to the objectives and tasks to be developed. The assembly also had people from the areas of social communication, social work, anthropology, audiovisuals and cultural workers.

[23] The virtual activities were shown on the assembly's social networks: Instagram and Facebook: "Agite Antirracista"; The festival was also broadcast on YouTube channels: "ToubaArgentine TV" and "Somos Plurinacional".

[24] The University Extension within the UNLP represents an institutional tool with its own budget. It is defined as the "construction of two-way knowledge" (UNLP 2008), a process in which producers and recipients alternate the role of "teachers" and "students".

with other teams of colleagues. This has allowed us to break down some conceptual and semantic barriers, as well as preconceptions, in the search for responses to the stated objectives. This created a reflective process, which was a permanent feature of the team's work, both in relation to the theories and concepts used, and to the methodological approaches taken. With regard to those approaches, we have had some concern about some of the training and teaching practices in methodological subjects, particularly in relation to the role of the researcher and the study subjects. We have identified a need to review assumptions about the production of knowledge from ethnographic practice and on the scope of this knowledge. That is why, in recent years, we have moved towards a positioning that understands our interlocutors as active subjects, capable of theorizing and participating in the production of legitimated knowledge.

In short, we have developed an extensive research work that has contributed to the field of studies on Afro-descendants and African migrations, in the local and regional academic sphere. However, in doing this, we have also assumed an ethical and political position that forces us to reflect on the impact and uses of this knowledge in a troubled context of demands for public policies and recognition.

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