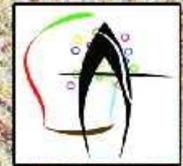




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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century

A África e os desafios do Século XXI

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

DRAFT VERSION
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“Penetrating the Unseen” The Role of Religion and Spiritual Practices in the Senegalese Boat Migration Process¹

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5 - 9 / 12 / 2011

Rabat Maroc / Morocco

Introduction

The wave of boat migration that rocked West Africa, particularly Senegal, from the mid 2000s to late 2000s was largely attributed to economic causes, and of late cultural and religious factors have been taken into account (Hahn & Klute, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2010). The role of religion in the migration process within academic discourse up till now has had little attention; especially with regard to the boat migration phenomenon (Castles, 2002; Meyer, 2000; Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003; Chitando, 2004; Vertovic, 2000). This neglect can be understood from the framework at which theories of migration largely focused – economy and demographic trends. Seen through the lens of Todaro (1976), the focus was on the neoclassical migration approach; Taylor (1986) looked at the new economies of labour migration. Even the tenets of social capital, did not imagine the *marabout* as a component of social/symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2011; Field, 2003) (probably because it was out of their scope of analysis). The continuation of migration is largely attributed to migrants' networks (Massey et al. 1987, Wilson, 1994). Another focal point is that of transnationalism spearheaded by Levitt et al. (2003) and Vetovec (2001). However, like the study of religion and migration, the literature on transnationalism and religion is also scanty. But as Peggy Levitt (2004) points out, there is a light in the tunnel as a fair amount of literature speaks to this (Vertovec, 2001; Beyer 2001; Robertson 1991, in Levitt, 2004: 3). By and large, theories of migration take into account the origin country and the persistence of transnational flows seen in the reviews of Massey et al (1993, 2006). It is generally assumed that migration is less responsive to variables like religion than is, to variables that are more about ideology and less about material standard of living. Albeit, religion occupies a central role in the lives of the fishers turned boat migrants as shall be delineated in this article.

Meyers (2000), shows how religious involvement for migration differs dramatically at various ages and whether children are present in the household. He goes further to develop the concept of location-specific religious capital. This is predicated on the fact that membership in strict and conservative religious organizations is viewed similarly for their requirement of large investments. As individuals invest more time and energy in the development and maintenance of location-specific religious capital, they will be increasingly hesitant to migrate out of their community and, thus, out of their church. The novelty about his study is that he juxtaposes decision-making theory with religious concepts to show that this theory could be used in understanding the impact of religion on migration. For their part, Hagan & Ebaugh (2003) study the use of religion in the migration process amongst the Guatemala Maya community. Although their focus is on the transnational Maya community

of Guatemala, this research fits quite well into the analytical research of Hagan & Ebaugh (ibid) as we both look at the role of religion in the various phases of migration process. In her study, Levitt (2004), focusing on the institutional aspects of transnational religious life, illustrates the ways in which different organizational configurations prompt migrants to engage in different combinations of home and host-country-oriented practices, the relationship between transnational religion and politics; in which she identifies three facets of religious transnationalism (Ibid, 2004: 2- 3). Focusing on the intersection of the motivations for emigration and innovative new forms of religious organization, Hoven (2003: 291) looks at the role of the *da'ira* in the emigration process. According to him, this "form of religious organization was a means to mediate the profound changes taking place in the rapidly changing context in which these movement had to operate" This study focuses on Islamic religious ideology and its impact on boat migration. The notion that "*quelq'un ne peut pas trahir son destine*"¹(one cannot betray his destiny) is very rife; for one's destiny can only be ordained by Allah, and the *marabouts* are there to mediate between the migrants and Allah to uphold the destiny reserved for the migrant.

This article sets out to describe processes, and analyses the engagement of *marabouts* in the various facets of boat migration in Senegal. The spiritual practices and the various forms of mystical performances that the *marabouts* engages in, as well as stipulated sacrifices to be offered by the migrant in a bid to secure a safe passage to Spain. My take is that religion and spiritual practices act as a form of social expression, and a vehicle for community building and identity as well as it speaks to the agency of the migrants.

The notion of religion and *maraboutage* appealed to the many migrants that undertook the perilous journey of boat migration. To the vast majority of the population, securing the benediction of the *marabout* is an integral component of their lifestyle; and such relationships are carefully cultivated. Boat migration has had its bearing on the one hand on the cultivated relationship that people have forged with their *marabouts*, and of the growing appeal of reformist Islamic ideology arising from the contestation about whether boat migration should be judged as suicide or martyrdom on the other.

The many *marabouts* who regarded it as martyrdom paved the way for the large numbers of migrants prepared to attain martyrdom by undertaking the journey, given the extent to which this is grounded in Islamic ideology. It is believed that anyone who drowns in the course of boat migration will become a martyr because he has sacrificed his life in an attempt to improve his family's living standards

¹ Interview with Diallo, Kayar: 25/11/08 (All names are pseudonyms)

As such, a well-entrenched system of bilateral relations between the religious *marabout* and a well organized religious society has provided a way for migration to thrive. In this regard, migrants and conveyors would not board a boat nor prepare one respectively without approval of a *marabout* and offering the required sacrifices demanded by the latter.

This article also resonates with Gozdzik & Shandy (2002: 129), editorial that broach religion and spirituality as a “form of emotional and cognitive support”, thanks to the *marabouts’* active involvement, the process gained currency in Senegal. The divine providence of the *marabout* is acceptable by a majority of the population especially those that are prepared to undertake boat migration. This may well be explained by the fact that the presence of the *marabout* is incorporated in the normative social system and operates through the normal social controls of that society, and shows Islam as a commodity that is not left behind when migrants travel. Accounts by failed and repatriated migrants attests to the above - detail how they sought the protection and guardianship of the *marabouts* to make the journey; and after, in spite of failures due to technical faults at high sea, *marabouts* claim it is thanks to their foresight and prayers that got them back safely.

In addition, this article will x-ray the development of religious transnational linkage with *marabouts* back in Senegal and successful boat migrants. Accounts on this last section are based on information gathered from family members in Senegal who run errands (meeting *marabouts* and performing whatever sacrifices the latter demands) on behalf of their kin in Spain. Interviews with families, talk of how their relatives in Spain call regularly asking that they consult a *marabout* on their behalf. And most often this request is accompanied by money sent by the migrants as gifts to the *marabout* and to carry out all the sacrifices that the latter will ask for. Before delving into the core of the discussions, our understanding of the paper will be enhanced by an over view of religion and migration in general and with a particular reference to Senegal.

Research was carried out from July 2008 to January 2009. Doing research during this period into the boat migration of Senegalese from Senegal to the Canary Islands, one recurrent theme was the role the returnees and families attributed to religion and *marabouts* in propelling this movement. Although not the intended focus of the research, it did encourage related questions towards this direction. This paper therefore draws on ethnographic findings of my research, and shows the privileged role religion and *marabouts* occupied in the surge of boat migration. With particular focus on Senegalese fisher migrants along the coastal regions of Senegal - Yarakh, Thiaroye-sur-Mer, Mbour, Kayar and Guet Ndar - Saint Louis - it will delineate how religion, through the mediation of the *marabouts*

played a major role in the following process: decision-making; preparation towards the journey and the actual journey in the boat migration process. These areas were chosen not out of choice, but by the fact that they doubled as the hubs of migration and were largely inhabited by fishers who were the navigators from these locations to The Canary Islands.

Religion and Migration

The rise of Pentecostal religion and the dominance of other religious groups have been very current in scholarly works (van Dijk, 1997), but the linkage with migration over the years is what has also escaped scholarship but for a few. But perhaps, this is because the focus on migration has been more on economic and social causes on the one hand, and the study of ICTs have largely dwelt on how it weakens or eliminate constraints on the realities of distance and space on the other hand. By the same token, the theories (Massey et al., 1993, 2006; Todaro, 1976) on migration have not equally given religion a chance. Today, the role of religion in the migration process and as a cushion effect cannot be underestimated as the church especially the Pentecostal has found new ways of re-asserting themselves and attracting more followers by paying attention to migrant communities.

Historically, migration is part and parcel of the Senegalese culture dating back to the days of slave trade, the travels (exile) of the religious leader of the Murides - Cheikh Amadou Bamba during the French colonial rule, migration also seen as a rite of passage and in more recent times migration exploded following the devaluation of the Franc CFA, and the global economic crisis that rolled out structural adjustment program for Africa (SAP). Boat migration therefore, was a catalyst of all of these (Nyamnjoh, 2010). Boat migrants set out for greener pasture in order to up lift the welfare of their family. Central to this is perhaps the solidarity shared amongst members of the Islamic religion wherein they carter for one another such that some of these migrants set off for Spain with the simple knowledge/assumption that they would be given accommodation by a fellow brother - Islam does not turn its back on her followers. This article therefore, questions to what extent does religion and *marabout* influence boat migration during the period that it lasted? Why maraboutage is deeply embedded within the repertoire of those undertaking the boat journey?

Boat migration took the country by storm, and migration therefore is affected by and has affected the growing appeal of reformist ideology which has arisen from the contestation of whether boat migration could be judge as suicide or as martyrdom. The conservatists *marabouts* view boat migration as 'unIslamic'/suicidal and preached against it, while the

reformist basing their ideology on the teachings of Amadou Bamba as seen above, hold that migrants who seek to travel by such means with the sole objective of helping their family should be hailed for their bravery; hence going to Spain by sea is not suicidal. According to the latter camp, in the event of death by drowning, such a person is considered as a martyr because he died to help the family. Confirmation of this comes from Modou who was one of the earliest organizers of a trip to Spain:

Quand l'emigration clandestine a commence il y'a quelques marabouts qui ont dit que ceux qui passent a la mer c'est pour leur suicide, mais il y'a des autres qui on dit non, si un home part a la mer pour faire travailler pour soutenir la famille, c'est ne pas la suicide. C'est volontaire pour aider la famille. Et ceux qui mort en cours de route ou la-bas partent au paradis parce ce que sit u est quitte ici pour travailler pour la famille et decede la-bas, tu pars directement au paradis parce ce que tu es parti pour soutinr la famille².

Contrary to claims that the obituary of religion has been written as suggested by Stark & Bainbridge (1996, in Hirscham, 2007: 392), the overly dependence on *maraboutage* and *grrgri* emphasizes the importance of religion and the role of the *marabouts* throughout the period of boat migration. Far more, the ideological warfare that embroiled signaled just how much power the *marabouts* command in Senegal. This pivotal role, I argue, is because it is only through religion and spiritual beliefs that migrants are able to find solace to justify their action, but much more find solace for the inevitable human experiences of death, suffering and loss.

Religion and Maraboutage in Senegal

Religion is a good that is consumed on a continuum from daily involvement to no involvement whatsoever. The value that individuals place on religion influences their levels of religious participation, commitment, and belief (Meyer, 2000). Rather than not wanting to migrate because of the benefits they stand to get from the location-specific-capital (*ibid*) (*marabouts*), migrants in this study would migrate bearing in mind that they can tap from this capital to enhance their chances of successfully migrating.

Islamic practices is often dominated by the Mouride and the Tidjane order, but as shown by van Hoven (2003), the Jabi marabouts are influenced by the teachings of the Qadiri mystical

² When clandestine migration started, some marabouts said those who went through the sea were suicidal, but others refused arguing that if a man goes by sea in order to work and support his family, then it is not suicide. It is a voluntary act to help his family. And those who die on the way or there, will go directly to paradise because they were trying to support their family. Interview, (St. Louis: 14/10/08; own translation).

traditions – prayers and local practices such as healing and divination. Each of these orders has its da'ira. While the Mouride and the Tidjane da'ira came as a result of the increasing change in the political landscape and urbanization (O'Brien, 1971), the Jabi da'ira main preoccupation is the intersection between the need for transnational migration and the adoption of the Senegalese da'ira model (van Hoven, 2003). Besides, the state is also increasingly involved in the affairs of the various orders through the heavy donations to the orders in an attempt to lure them implement its policies, owing to their appeal to the weak and the socially marginal (O'Brien & Coulon, 1988).

As opined by Rudolph & Piscatori, (1997) in Islam, the mystical order formed around saints (*marabouts*) has played a pivotal role in the process of transnationalism. They see and can foresee the future, and are capable of penetrating the unseen. It is therefore this power to foresee and to penetrate the unseen that migrants have been tapping from, with the hope of making the sea journey. Little wonder when the migrants return from a failed journey they go to see the *marabouts* to find out why the journey failed. Often, they are told it is thanks to his spiritual powers, he was able to 'see' that they are in difficulties, and thanks to his timely intervention they are able to come out alive. Such stories only help to intensify the belief in them and whatever is said is taken to be the gospel truth. This underscores the fact that the *marabouts'* spheres of influence are not compounded by time and space and their mediation is not rooted geographically.

Based on my knowledge of Senegal, Islamic practicing Senegalese are very much into *maraboutage* and tend to personalize *marabouts*; for it is not uncommon to hear someone say 'I am going to consult my *marabout*'; 'my *marabout* said that ... Thus making it difficult for major decisions to be taken without consulting the latter. The advent of boat migration underscored this aspect. Contrary to van Hoven's (2003) idea that a visit to a spiritual centre is a sine quo non for emigration, this needed the approval of the *marabout*. Not everyone who consulted him was given the green light to travel in the case when the *marabout* has foreseen a turbulent journey. For such persons, they were told not to migrate, and were obliged to give up their aspirations, while others were asked to perform specific sacrifices to clear their way. Not only do we witness the relationship between the *marabout* and his believers, but also, the entrenched belief and faith in him; his pronouncements are unchallenged and most be adhered to.

In order to have a better ethnographic understanding of the socio-cultural and economic settings encounter by these fishers, and the relationship between fishing and *maraboutage*, to

get a sense of the dynamics of the community, I will present the fishers and their community and events leading up to boat migration before I return the central discussions.

The Community and fishing

Fishing in the coastal areas of Senegal that were the loci of this research –Yarack; Thiaroye-Sur-Mer; Kayar; Mbour and St. Louis - is practiced mostly by the Lebo communities. In Saint Louis they are the Guet Ndariennes - a name derived from the neighbourhood in which they live, Guet Ndar. It is quite a run down neighbourhood, with the only government facility being the health centre and the post office which also hosts Western Union (used by migrants for money transfer). Fishing to them necessitates seasonal mobility following the migratory season of the fish. Prior to boat migration, the Guet Ndiarienne lived a communal lifestyle where family unity was centred on the pirogue (Bonnardel, 1992: 242; Camara³, 1968: 164). At fifty, a father retires⁴ and his sons go fishing together with relatives and friends under his tutelage. Fishing created a rigid kind of lifestyle among the Guet Ndariennes and the rest of the fishing community that was marked by simplicity and a lack of attachment to conspicuous consumption. This lifestyle was gradually eroded with the arrival of foreign fishing trawlers such as those from China, Japan, Korea and some from Central Europe. With such industrial fishing, it left little or nothing for the artisanal fishers to harvest despite their use of robust engine boats. The massive fishing does seem to be done under the watchful eyes of the government (see Nyamnjoh, 2010: 180-181). The only occupation known to the current generation of fishers is fishing, unlike their predecessors who practiced it simultaneously with agriculture. Their daily activities are conditioned by fishing and mobility is a major component as they migrate seasonally in pursuit of fish. From November to June most fishers migrate to Kayar, Mbour and Joal and then back to Guet Ndar for the fishing season there from April to July, and from August to November they move to Nouadhibou and the Casamance in Mauritania and the south of Senegal respectively, when the fish migrate northwards and southwards (see Bonnardel, 1992; Camara, 1968). This portrays a culture of migration amongst the fishers, and no doubt accounts for why the fishermen and the fishing sector have come to be at the epicentre of clandestine migration. Being able to navigate all year round from St. Louis to other neighbouring towns and countries – Zinguinchor, Nouadhibou and Nouackchott, Guinea Bissau and The Gambia – has meant that they saw themselves as the conquerors of the sea.

³ This literature may be more than 4 decades, but it is still relevant today as it was then.

⁴ This is usually because they started fishing as young as 10 years old.

Sailing to the Canary Islands was just another fishing expedition for them, but this time fishing for the niceties of the good life (Nyamnjoh, 2010: 12-13).

And so when boat migration started, the fishermen saw themselves not only as those whose lifestyle hinged on seasonal migration, but equally as those who have tamed and domesticated the sea. Going also could be seen as a way of going away from the filth and run down locations that lacked basic amenities which they inhabited. The group therefore saw a golden opportunity in going to Spain in search of wealth and comfort, given how much their lifestyle had changed. In the sections that follow, I will detail the different ways how migrants used religion and spiritual practices to enhance the migration process.

Marabouts inform decision to migrate

Migrants acknowledge the constraint of the sea journey given that arrival in Europe largely depends on the weather (high tides), and the ability of the navigator to sail through. Equally, they believe in the destiny ordained for them by *Allah* which must not be overlooked. Apart from these, the exorbitant cost of paying the conveyer entails some mothers to sell their gold jewelry (given the journey was mostly financed by mothers), put up the house as collateral, family contribution or get a loan to pay for the passage. All of these inform their decision to consult a *marabout* prior to migrating. Although not all returnees acknowledged to have consulted a *marabout* prior to migrating, a considerable number talked of having consulted them to seek information about their chances of succeeding if they undertake the journey, as well as to get protective amulet from them to enhance a safe passage. The decision to migrate depends by and large on the *marabout*. In the event that the *marabout* confirms the journey will be successful, he orders that the intended migrant offers sacrifices to appease the gods of the sea in order to have a safe passage. Such sacrifices consist of distributing food items to the neighbours and most especially to the *talibes* – Koranic pupils. The views expressed by most of the informants are aptly captured in the excerpts from this interview with Diop - conveyer/migrant:

Q: donc avant de partir tu as vu le marabout?

R: Avant de partir, il faut préparer le voyage pour voir s'il ya d'éventuels obstacles et de les faire écarter. La plus part des pirogues ont fait naufrage.

Ces voyages nous les préparons, parce qu'ils sont périlleux. Tu peux rencontrer n'importe quoi. Parce qu'il ya tellement de morts. Il y avait un Chérif qui est entré en

« *khalwa* ». *Le marabout entre en communication avec ses pouvoirs mystiques et surnaturels pour lire et regarder tout le voyage en restant où il est.*

Si tu veux vraiment partir, tu prépares le voyage, tu vois des marabouts qui te font des gris gris.

On devait immoler un chameau qu'on achète à 400 000f. On l'a immolé et c'était pour enlever les obstacles.

Q: *c'est lui qui a tué le chameau ou c'est vous ?*

R *non on a acheté le chameau et on l'a donné au marabout. Il l'a tué pour ensuite partager la viande aux gens. Il y a beaucoup de naufrages, des disparus pour plusieurs raisons parce que les sorciers s'invitent au voyage.*

Q: *Et par la suite le marabout te fait des gris gris?*

R: *le dernier voyage que j'ai fait, j'avais un gris gris et quand des bateaux traversaient notre pirogue qui était en panne, ils ne nous voient même pas. Je les appelai mais ils ne pouvaient pas me voir. Finalement j'ai jeté le gris gris et ils m'ont vu .*

Q: *et le marabout, il ne te déconseille pas le voyage?*

R: *si. J'ai un ami qui est une fois parti voir un marabout qui lui a conseillé de déprogrammer un voyage parce qu'il y avait beaucoup des risques pour lui.*

Et finalement il n'est pas parti, il est resté⁵.

The intent of such a long excerpt is to show how prospective migrants and those repatriated relate with the *marabout* –central to their decision to migrate.

It should be recalled that Diop made two journeys to Spain; the first of which he arrived but was repatriated, and the second, aborted due to technical problems with the engines. On return after the first journey, he went back to the *marabout* to find out why he was repatriated

⁵ Q: so you saw the marabout before going?

A: Before going you have to prepare for any eventual obstacles and thwart them. Most of the boats were wrecked. We get ready for these trips because they are dangerous. You can come across anything. There was a marabout who went into a transcendental meditation; wherein he communicates with mystical and supernatural powers to understand and foresee all about the journey by staying put at the same spot. If you really want to go you get ready for the journey and see marabout that make you talismans. We had to sacrifice a camel which we bought for 400 000 Frs. CFA. We sacrificed it to remove all obstacles.

Q: Did he kill the camel or was it done by you?

A: No, we bought the camel and gave it to the marabout. He then killed it and shared it to people. There are a lot of boats that wreck and people get missing because wizards come onboard.

Q: and after that the marabout made you some talismans?

A: On the last trip I made, I had a talisman. Then, our boat broke down and a boat passing by couldn't see me despite the fact that i waved and shouted. Finally, I threw the talisman and they saw me.

Q: Didn't the marabout advice you not to take the trip?

A: Yes. I had a friend who once went to see a marabout who told him not to take the trip because it would be too risky for him. He finally stayed, he didn't go. He hadn't eve paid. He simply went and saw the marabout. He told me the marabout said that the trip wouldn't go well so he stayed. (Interview, Mbour: 03/09/08)

Quand je suis revenu, j'ai vu le marabout qui m'a dit qu'il a oublié d'assurer de nous faire rester là bas.

Q: Donc tout le monde n'est pas resté?

R: les Gambiens sont resté en Espagne, mais pour nous les Sénégalais on nous a fait revenir⁶.

While individual migrants seek to get protection from the *marabouts*, the organizer of the journey (*porteur*) together with the navigators (*capitaines*) consults the *marabout* to protect the navigators and to ensure the journey is not beset with any danger. The organizer equally goes to the *marabout* with the final list of those that have paid to be transported. In turn the *marabout* prays over it and performs sacrifices to determine whose presence will obstruct the journey or if all the passengers are fit to travel. It is only upon confirmation by the *marabout* that all the passengers are eligible to travel that the pirogue sets sail, but whoever is not fit to travel, his money is refunded and he is asked by the conveyor to consult another *marabout*. Similarly, the *marabout* goes beyond giving the final decision to migrate, but in some cases he spells out to the conveyor the particular day on which the journey should be made.

Avec un oncle, nous sommes parti consulter le marabout à propos des clandestins qui voulaient voyager. Il leur a donné un jour. Il peut partis ce jour. Quand ils sont arrivés en Espagne, toute la pirogue a été libérée. Il y avait plus de 100 personnes, tous ont été autorisés d'entrer dans le pays, en Espagne. Et il en a fait pour deux ou trois pirogues comme ça⁷.

On the whole, these informants speak for the thousands of migrants who made the perilous journey and how they virtually relied on the powers of the *marabouts*.

Their faith and trust in *marabouts* has blinded the migrants' understanding of the protocol signed between the Senegalese and Spanish governments to return all Senegalese citizens. Hence any repatriation is perceived as failure on the part of the *marabout*, or attributed to jealousy from a fellow mate in the case of polygamous marriage.

Preparing for the journey

When the *marabout* approves of the journey, he goes further to prescribe the various offerings/sacrifices that the prospective migrant will carry out in order to pave the way for a

⁶When I got back, I saw the marabout who said he had forgotten to make sure our stay there was guaranteed.

Q: So everybody didn't stay?

A: The Gambians stayed in Spain but they made us the Senegalese come back. Interview, Mbour: 03/09/08

⁷ We went with an uncle to go and consult the marabout about the illegal immigrants who wanted to make the crossing. The marabout gave them a day on which they could go. When they got to Spain, the whole boat was allowed to go through. There were about 100 people and all were authorised to enter the country. The marabout did the same for two or three other boats. (Interview, Kayar: 05/11/08)

successful journey. Most often this money for the sacrificed is raised by the mother from her accumulated savings over a long period, or family members chip in some funds with the hope that when he succeeds they will share in the benefits. For others, such protection does not go far enough and they embark on a more sophisticated one to ensure that nothing gets on their way. They go a step further by having '*un bain mystique*' (mystical bath). This process according to my informants, involve spending the night at the *marabouts*', who in the depth of the night gives the migrant water mixed with concocted herbs to bath with. According to them, this is the highest form of protection any migrant could seek for. For instance, Diallo an informant in Kayar attempted two journeys to Spain. In the first, because he was desperate to reach his destination, he performed the mystical bath. By design or by coincidence, his arrival in Spain made him to believe that thanks to the bath he succeeded in getting to Spain. Unfortunately, he was repatriated a week after. Upon arrival, he went back to the *marabout* who informed him that the bath was to ensure that he arrives in Spain and nothing was done to enable him to stay on in Spain. Still nursing the urge to migrate again and with the *marabout*'s promises that all will be taken care of in the event that he wants to go again. Without any more money, he reached an agreement with the *marabout* to pay him when he arrives in Spain and secures a job. Two weeks after being repatriated, he set sail again for Spain, but was met with a further repatriation by the joint forces of the coast guard and the aerial patrol helicopters - their pirogue was intercepted at high sea, and they were escorted back to Senegal and this ended his dream to migrate to Spain.

The role of the *marabouts* was not simply to give protection - 'looking' if it is safe for them to migrate but also, a subtle form of encouragement that they gave to the migrants especially those who have attempted and failed; with reassurance of success. Having attempted the journey and failed means that a lot of money has been spent hence the urgent need to go back and this is what perhaps the *marabout* uses to play on their psychic. If the African proverb that 'a drowning man clinches on a serpent' is anything to go by, then, it is precisely for this reason that the migrants will do whatever is asked of them by the *marabouts* to attain their goal even if they are being exploited by the latter to enrich themselves.

Presence of marabouts in the course of the journey

With the consent and blessings of the *marabout* the migrant sets out on the journey, while the presence of the *marabout* is still very much invariably felt at this stage. In the course of the journey, families left behind continue to seek the intervention of the *marabout* and offer sacrifices.

Much as this form of migration is wide spread, knowledge about who is preparing a boat or the point of departure⁸ is very scarce. The corollary being that some migrants leave without consulting a *marabout* due to the abruptness of the journey. In such instances, the family especially the mother is charged to consult one on his behalf. A case in point is that of Fatima whose two sons left Thiaroye-sur-Mer to St Louis as soon as they heard there was a boat ready to leave for Spain. All they could do was asked for prayers from their parents given the abruptness of the journey. Upon their departure, the mother embarked on consulting *marabouts* on their behalf to ensure a safe passage.

après leur départ je suis parti chez le marabout et beaucoup meme

Q: qu'est ce qu'il vous a dit?

R: ils m'ont demandé de faire des offrandes parce qu'ils étaient dans un endroit obscur dont seul Dieu pourrait les sortir.

Q: quels genres d'offrandes?

R: chèvres, moutons, poulets et même une moitié de vache.

et tout cela j'en ai fait des offrandes comme on me l'a indiqué.

Ce n'était pas pour les deux enfants seulement mais ils étaient accompagnés. On devait faire un sacrifice collectif pour sauver tout le monde. C'est la raison pour laquelle ça n'a pas été facile⁹

Consultation of *marabouts* is no guarantee to a safe passage as we have seen above. But to increase the chances of success, *marabouts* give *gris-gris* to the migrants to carry with them in the course of the journey. These consist either of verses from the Koran that is stitched in a small leather pouch and the migrants tie round their arm or waist or concoctions package in the same manner and given to migrants. In the event where the migrant performed the mystical bath before his departure, the *marabout* remains behind and performs a *listakar* – an all night prayer vigil (on the day of departure). And when the migrants leave abruptly, the families stay behind and visit the marabout on the migrant's behalf.

Besides, the *marabout* also writes verses from the Koran on a slate and gives to the navigator to attach in front and at the back of the pirogue as they sail along. This, it is

⁸ This was a guarded secret because of fear of sabotage and arrest by the police.

⁹After their departure, I went to not only one marabout but several.

Q: What did they say?

A: they asked me to make offerings because they were in a dark place from which only God could get them out

Q: What sort of offerings?

A: Goats, rams, chickens and even half a cow. This was not only for the two children but those who accompanied them as well. We had to make one big sacrifice to save them all. That was the reason why it wasn't easy. (Interview, Thiaroye-Sur -Mer: 26/08/08)

thought would scare away any evil spirit on their way, calm the high sea and above all keep the pirogue intact from disintegrating. But also, it will give the passengers a form of tranquility within themselves – that of being watched over by *Allah*. By the same token, we must equally not lose sight of the domino effect this has on the psyche of the migrants; it gives them that assurance that all will be fine in the course of the journey '*in-sha-allah*' (God willing)

Despite all the assurances by the *marabouts*, migrants still go an extra mile to seek protection from the saints. The followers of the Mouride carry photograph of their spiritual leader while the Tidjane also carry that of their leader. In this light, photographs of saints and the sects' major religious symbols become a kind of emblem to migrants. Being a member of any of these sects compels one to carry photograph of the saint they believe in. This image does not only help to overcome the distance between the parties, or support the *marabout*-disciple relationship, it became an integral part and parcel of migrants who could be seen wearing photos of their various saints larger than the size of a passport size photo in the course of the journey. It is believed the saints would watch over them as their guardian angel. Amongst them, the most widely used photograph is that of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the saint of the Mourides.

In addition, some families showed their family shrines where they prayed together with their sons prior to migration. This shrine is a small section in the compound that is secluded from the rest of the house with corrugated iron sheets with some shrubs planted in it and all sorts of clothe could be found loosely tied round the shrubs. It is believed this shrine is representative of their ancestors who are called upon to watch over them as they make the journey into uncertainty. In the course the journey, the family stays behind and prays for their migrant son in the shrine. Some of the family's talisman that is meant for the general protection of the entire family is handed to the migrant to go with. A case in point is that of Penn who handed the family's talisman to the brother who together with other members of the family left for Spain.

J'avais des talismans que j'avais pendant plus de 20ans. Je le gardais pour une protection de la famille ou une protection personnelle en cas de danger, le danger étant imminent au niveau de mer, j'étais obligé de leur remettre cela. c'était pour leur assurer un trajet doux et calme pour arriver à bon part dans des bonnes conditions¹⁰.

¹⁰ I had talismans which I had kept for more than 20 years. I kept it for the protection of the family or for personal protection in the event of any danger. Since danger was imminent at sea, I had to give it to them (brothers) in order to ensure that they had a smooth and calm crossing and arrived there in good shape. (Interview, Kayar, 05/11/08)

Transnational links between successful migrants and marabouts

Many aspects of religious life have long been global. Contemporary migrants extend and deepen these cross-border ties by transnationalizing everyday religious practice thanks to the revolution in ICTs. This study on the boat migrant emphasizes strong religious ties to their home country, perhaps, at the expense of receiving-country social integration. In addition to earning their livelihoods and supporting their families by "keeping feet in two worlds", transnational migrants expand already global religious institutions and assert their dual memberships in spiritual arenas. By doing so, they broaden and thicken the globalization of religious life (Levitt, 2004: 2).

Prior to the explosion of boat migration, *marabouts* most often relied on the *talibes* for income either by working on their fields¹¹ or from the families of the *talibes* in support of the *marabout*, and the *talibes* daily outings in search for money for their sustenance; a part of which is given to the *marabout*. This culture is gradually eroding due to the financial and material support *marabouts* get from their migrant disciples. Given how much migration is culturally engrained in the Senegalese repertoire, migrants still owe allegiance to their respective *marabouts* and seek to pay their tithes (See also Bowen, 2004). The advent of boat migration has even taken these transnational ties to a higher height as migrants do not only seek to pay their tithes, but also send money for the *marabout* to intercede for them (see also van Hoven, 2003: 301-302). Far more, the notion of transnationalism draws on Islam's history of movement, communication and institutional innovation. My take is that the remission of money by successful migrants to *marabouts* is, inter alia, a long standing tradition that the new migrants are following, but also, a way of seeking spiritual fulfillment on the one hand, and on the other, propels the *marabouts'* standings in the society into fame and significantly increased their credibility judging from the number of prospective migrants who depended on them (*marabout*) for a safe crossing. The ripple effect is that, it also created encounters between the latter and the politician; given how much they are believed in by the migrants, the political status quo saw the need to ally with them in order to send the message to would be migrants through Friday sermons - discourage subsequent migrants from migrating. As afore mentioned, accounts on this section are based on information by family members who run the errands between their migrant sons and the *marabouts*.

Transnational ties between migrants and *marabouts*, with their families as intermediaries, have no doubt been accentuated thanks to the revolution in Information and Communication

¹¹ Most of those in the urban centres did not have fields and have to rely on the generosity of the community through offerings made to *talibes*.

Technology (ICT) especially the vagaries of money transfer units. Through this medium, monetary gifts are sent via the families to the *marabout* as well as that for performing sacrifices, what van Hoven (2003) terms the 'sacred exchange' in which 'private commodities and public donations' are juxtaposed. These two are inextricably linked in that, the migrant sends money as gift to the *marabout*; and at times the money is accompanied with the latest cell phones in the market. By the same token, he sends money which is meant for performing sacrifice. As opposed to taking part in 'comprehensive transnational practices', the boat migrants practice 'selective transnational practices' (Levitt et al., 2003: 569-570)

According to families of successful migrants, safe passage through the sea is largely attributed to the *marabout*. The prayers and *gri-gri* (talisman) sought from the latter is believed to have protected and allowed them to sail through; as shown above. Having successfully sailed through, the migrants still need the intervention of the *marabouts'* prayers and sacrifices for continuous success. The families left behind become an intermediary between the *marabouts* and their migrant sons/relatives.

Before the boom in boat migration, *marabouts* enjoy gifts from other migrants, but the later form of migration caused an explosion in remission of gifts in cash to them thanks to the various money transfer units in Senegal. According to Stewart 1973, these gifts are "a voluntary gift presented to a religious figure by an individual seeking his intervention in a spiritual matter, his patronage or in general his goodwill" (in van Hoven, 2003: 302). This corroborates the stories told by family members. Often, migrants send two forms of gifts, one simply as gift/offering to the *marabout* and another to perform whatever sacrifice he may need to intercede on their behalf.

Acknowledging the role of the *marabout* towards her sons safe passage, Fatou now runs all their errands with the former, performs any sacrifice called for by the *marabout* on their behalf. For most migrants like Fatou's sons, their pressing request from the *marabout* is to intercede for them to get a work permit/job and a resident permit. The latter in turn prescribes specific verses of the Koran that the mother should communicate to them, as well as specific forms of sacrifices to be performed. This often consist of sharing food (meat and rice), and homemade juice (*bissap* - sorrel, baobab - monkey bread and tamarind) to the *talibes* and neighbours; most often done by the *marabout* who mobilizes the recipients as he sees fit.

Although barely eking a living from hawking, according to families, the migrants spare no opportunity in sending gifts in cash and in kind (often the latest cell phones in the market) through relations to hand over to the *marabouts*. This according to them is part of

their own obligation towards their spiritual mentor, and in so doing; they hope to receive the graces in the form of answered petitions. Some family members talk of how once they get to the *marabout*; they 'beep' relatives in Spain to communicate directly with the marabout. Together they pray on the phone and he also advises what verses from the Koran to read and how to comport himself.

Success *per se* is not a given, even after arriving Spain, they still overly rely on the *marabouts'* intervention to have a work/resident permit or better still to get married to a Spanish lady, and for their daily protection. The continuous sending of money to the *marabout* via their respective families is testimony of the fact that there is continued interaction between the *marabout* and the migrants even though they are forging a new life abroad. However, this dependency on the *marabouts* seems to be somehow periodic; once the graces have been received, they no longer seek the intervention of the *marabout*. For instance, I met Coumba in 2008 in Mbour, and he was amongst the first boat migrant in 2005, he was already married to a Spanish wife and had a resident/work permit. His life was complete. His main focus was trading – brings cars from Spain and sell in Mbour, and has been to Senegal twice since his departure.

The annual pilgrimage (*magal*) to Touba – Senegal's second largest town – is a special occasion that brings together thousands of Mouride faithful in and out of Senegal. And it is equally followed by thousands of migrant faithful of the *Khalif* via satellite. Some migrants actually undertake the journey to attend the *magal*. For those who cannot make it (especially the recent boat migrants) they send home camcorder and empty cassettes to relative to film the entire occasion and send back to them. This is in addition to buying audio and video cassettes of the sermons send to them. These messages from the *Khalif* have a cushioning effect on the migrants as it gives them hope that success is eminent. The only weapons they have to shield themselves with is 'hope' – hope to arrive Spain thanks to the intervention of the *marabout*, and hope of succeeding thanks to him again, and hope that things will be better.

Although most of the boat migrants (especially the fishers) are not literate and equally not versed with the internet, a few of them do and are able to link up to Cheikh Amadou Bamba's site – a site that targets migrants. According to Mbaye, his attention to the site was drawn by his brother in Spain who made allusion to it on one of their phone conversations. The site "gives a detailed presentation of Mouridism and its role in the 'rehabilitation of Islam' ..., it also describes and explains Islam's major events and gathering, and above all, deals with the personality of Cheikh Amadou Bamba" (Gueye, 2003; 622). To

those who have access to the site, they listen to the sermons of their spiritual leader as well as his poems sung by the followers of the *da'ira* - religious community (Ibid, 2003). The site provides an opportunity for the migrants to stay close to their religious ideologies and to be a virtual part of events in Touba, and for those who were lacking in their closeness to the brotherhood, the challenges of migration has offered them an opportunity to reconcile with their spiritual leader in the hope of mitigating them and seeking solace from his sermons.

Furthermore, migrants also seek to attain a higher level of spirituality by performing religious rites back home that they have been unable to carry out due to financial constraints - naming ceremony (*baptême*) is one of such rites.

In conclusion

The aim of this paper was to chronicle the role of the *marabout* and the spiritual practices involved in the various facets of boat migration. The *marabouts* as we have seen are not mere 'poachers' infringing 'on the territory of political entrepreneurs Diop & Diouf (1990) whose legitimacy is hinged on 'overlapping positions'. Rather, they use their religious resources to strengthen their economic and political positions and, conversely, use political resources to enhance their charisma and saintliness. As a recourse of this position, they are able to convince prospective migrants that embarking on the journey is nothing but attempting to secure a better life for one's family; and in the event of death such a person is a martyr. The ripple effect of this stance is the *marabouts'* convincing powers, to enhance migration, through his clairvoyance ability and the 'supernatural' powers bestowed in them. Their influential role in propelling migration therefore, is over and above owing to their appeal to the weak and socially marginal; who comprised a large proportion of the migrants. Conversely, the government also had to rely on the power of their appeal to dissuade the migrants from undertaking the perilous journey.

From the data presented, there is evidence to show that migrants depended on the *marabouts* and religion at every stage of the boat migration process. Although migration studies have largely focused on economic tendencies and migrant networks to explain the motive and decision in migrating, the focus on religion - in the Pentecostal and Catholic churches - as well as the powers of the *marabouts* in the Islamic faith has been greatly ignored.

The mystical orders (perception) formed around *marabouts* and their spiritual prowess has played a pivotal role in processes of transnationalism, with the family mediating between them. This transnational links created with *marabout* have been largely facilitated

by the revolution of ICTs. Given the *marabouts'* rituals of invisible and foresight, the migrants believe they have the ability to not only protect them but also through these rituals pave the way of success for them through their ability of penetrating the unseen. The invisibility of the marabouts we must remember is not impeded by time and space. The overly reliance on the *marabout* may lead us to conclude that these migrants are preparing a long term transnational connection that would cushion in their stay in Spain or the next country of destination as in some cases, Spain is used as a spring board to launch their migration.

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