



LUND UNIVERSITY

Mobility as a Practice

Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands

Pacciardi, Agnese

2025

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Pacciardi, A. (2025). *Mobility as a Practice: Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands*. [Doctoral Thesis (monograph), Department of Political Science]. Media-Tryck, Lund University, Sweden.

Total number of authors:

1

General rights

Unless other specific re-use rights are stated the following general rights apply:

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

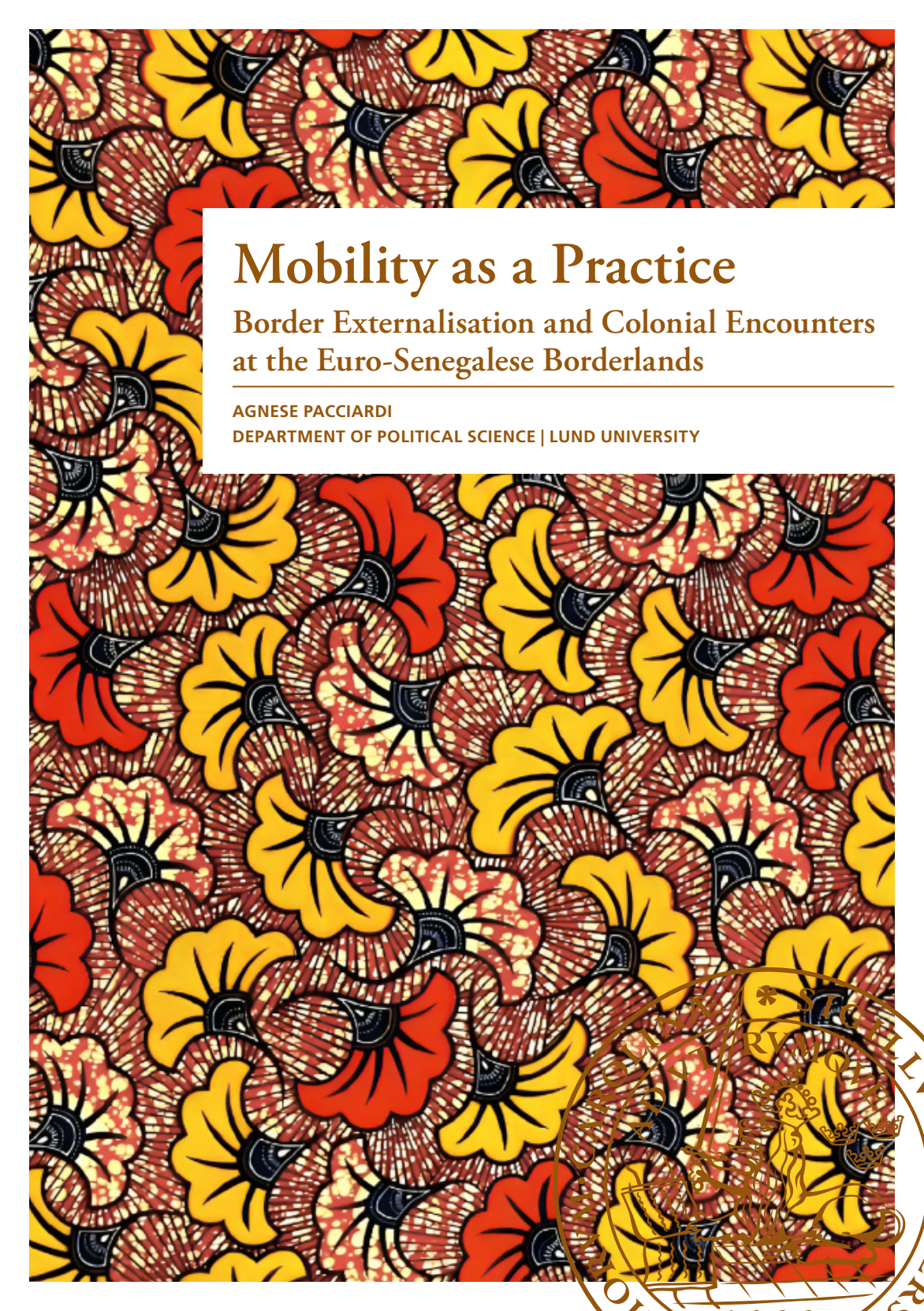
Read more about Creative commons licenses: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117
221 00 Lund
+46 46-222 00 00



Mobility as a Practice

Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands

AGNESE PACCIARDI

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE | LUND UNIVERSITY



Mobility as a Practice

Mobility as a Practice

Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands

Agnese Pacciardi



LUND
UNIVERSITY

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Doctoral dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the
Faculty of Political Science at Lund University to be publicly defended on
7th of November at 10.15 in Eden hörsal Hall, Department of Political
Science, Allhegona kyrkogata 14 (Eden), 22100 Lund

Faculty opponent

Joris Schapendonk, Radboud University

Organisation: LUND UNIVERSITY

Document name: DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

Date of disputation: 7 November 2025

Author(s): Agnese Pacciardi

Title and subtitle: Mobility as a Practice: Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands

Abstract:

What do we learn about borders and migration policies when we examine them from the perspective of communities living in the borderlands, and through the theoretical lenses of mobility?

This thesis explores the effects of EU border externalisation policies on those most affected by them, focusing on the lived experiences of Senegalese communities throughout Senegal. Through extensive ethnographic fieldwork, it investigates how individuals and communities navigate, adapt to and contest the constraints imposed by externalised borders whether or not they are on the move. Drawing on and contributing to critical border and migration studies, and grounded in feminist decolonial epistemologies, this research shifts the analytical gaze from the border itself to mobility as a multidimensional practice: imagined, embodied, and political. In doing so, it reveals how the spillover effects of border externalisation extend far beyond individual border-crossers, embedding violence, death, and precarity into everyday life across entire communities. Yet, it also shows how these same individuals and communities reappropriate and resist these constraints through creative and strategic expressions of agency, making visible a broader range of possibilities that challenges dominant migration and border regimes.

Key words: border externalisation, mobility, migration, West Africa, gender, decoloniality

Language: English

Number of pages: 379

ISSN and key title: 0460-0037, Lund Political Science 227

ISBN: 978-91-8104-640-3 (print)

978-91-8104-641-0 (electronic)

I, the undersigned, being the copyright owner of the abstract of the above-mentioned dissertation, hereby grant to all reference sources permission to publish and disseminate the abstract of the above-mentioned dissertation.

Signature:

Date: 2025-09-24

Mobility as Practice

Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese Borderlands

Agnese Pacciardi



LUND
UNIVERSITY

Copyright

© 2026 Agnese Pacciardi (licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) This license enables reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator. The license allows for commercial use.)

Coverphoto by Manuel Gil Martinez

Published by:

Department of Political Science

Faculty of Social Sciences

Lund University

ISBN 978-91-8104-640-3 (print)

ISBN 978-91-8104-641-0 (e-book)

Printed in Sweden by Media-Tryck, Lund University,
Lund, 2026



Media-Tryck is a Nordic Swan Ecolabel
certified provider of printed material.
Read more about our environmental
work at www.mediatryck.lu.se

MADE IN SWEDEN 

Alle mie nonne, Mirella e Doriana, che non hanno potuto studiare

Acknowledgements

Writing a thesis is never a solitary endeavor; it is sustained by one's roots and enriched by the encounters made along the way. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the people to whom I owe parts and pieces of this work.

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the people in Senegal who welcomed me into their homes and entrusted me with their stories. Although I cannot list your names here, I hope you find this work has done justice to your words. This thesis would not have been possible without your trust and generosity. Jërëjëf!

I am also deeply grateful to all those, both individuals and organizations, who facilitated my stay in Senegal. In particular, I would like to thank Odome Angone for your supervision during my first and second visit at the University of Dakar, and Paquita for being a wonderful and caring host.

During the course of my PhD journey, I have had the pleasure to cross paths with several intellectual communities across countries that have significantly shaped my ideas, thinking, and writing, making my work what it is today.

Anna Casaglia, my Master's thesis supervisor in Italy, thank you for teaching me how to think critically, for opening my eyes to see the world at its roots, and for inspiring me, through your lectures, to do what I do.

Fredrik Söderbaum, thank you for first believing I could do a PhD, for making it possible for me to come to Sweden, and for your continuous support, guidance, and mentorship throughout this journey.

Joakim Berndtsson, thank you for including me in the project that planted the seed of this work; I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with you and the rest of the team.

A huge thank you to my dream team of supervisors, you have helped me grow academically and personally. Annika Björkdahl, thank you for guiding me throughout the ups and downs of this journey with your kindness and relentless support, and for always trusting me, letting me learn and make mistakes while

being there. Sarah Scuzzarello, thank you for pushing me further when I thought I was “already there,” for reading my several drafts with such thoroughness, and for providing the most insightful comments on my text; they have helped me in ways beyond what I could ask for. Anders Uhlin, thank you for your guidance and for always having such kind words when reading my drafts; you have often understood better than anyone else what I was trying to convey, and pushed me to bring it out.

Priscyll Anctil Avoine gracias por haber sido mi casa académica y personal durante estos cuatro años. Tu sororidad, incluso antes que nuestra afinidad académica, ha sido el motor que ha impulsado parte de este trabajo. La intimidad de nuestras charlas y las risas, que siempre empezaban con el doctorado para acabar en lo personal, me han enseñado la más grande clase de feminismo: que lo personal es político, siempre.

I also want to thank colleagues in Sweden who have engaged with my work at various stages, providing much-needed insights and inspiring me to constantly improve my work, in particular: Agustín Goenaga, Joel Abdelmoez, Catarina Kinvall, Lena Kempermann, Jenny Lorentzen, Annika Lindberg, Malte Breiding Hansen, Marie Stissing Jensen, Markus Holdo, Christie Nicholson, Simon Stattin, Lars Vetle Handeland, Teresa Cappiali, Catia Gregoratti, and Norma Montesino Parra. A special thank you to Bibi Imre-Millei for being a true friend beyond a colleague, and to Barbara Magalhães Teixeira for her unwavering support, for listening and caring, and for reminding me of the importance of continuing to do what we do, no matter the challenges along the way.

I also wish to extend my gratitude to Björn Badersten and Tina Jönsson for their support as heads of department, as well as Fariborz Zelli, Magdalena Bexell, Sara Kalm, and Ted Svensson for their support as heads of PhD studies. My gratitude also extends to the administrative staff at Eden, who have guided me through the mysteries of bureaucracy and the Eden building. I also wish to acknowledge the Helge Axson Johnsons Stiftelse, the Forskraftstiftelsen Theodor Adelswårds Minne, the Lars Hiertas Memorial Foundation, the Swedish Network for European Studies, and the Department of Political Science for providing me the financial means to carry out this project.

Pursuing an academic career for me meant uprooting myself and being far from the places I call home. While doing my PhD, I also had to make Sweden a home and create the necessary environment to thrive, which I could not have done without the support of some very special people.

Manu, gracias por haber decidido ser mi casa y mis raíces en Suecia y en cualquier otro lado, gracias por tu amor, apoyo y cariño, por cocinarme cuando la tesis me ocupaba todo el tiempo, por el soporte técnico, y por ayudarme a verlo todo con perspectiva.

Un grazie speciale a Giulia e Letizia, siete la mia famiglia svedese. Grazie per le passeggiate, le chiacchierate infinite, le risate e il cibo che mi hanno tenuto a galla anche nei momenti di stress e ansia, e per ricordarmi che c'è vita anche (e soprattutto) oltre il dottorato.

A heartfelt thanks to Magnus for welcoming me into his home like a daughter, and making my first months in Sweden so much easier.

At the same time, this thesis would not have seen the light without the love and support of those who, although far, have shaped who I am, providing continuous love and care throughout my PhD journey.

In particolare i miei genitori, Mara e Alessandro, per avermi cresciuta in uno spazio pieno di amore e cura, e per avermi instillato la curiosità e l'amore per la conoscenza. Grazie per essere sempre così fieri e orgogliosi di me; attraverso i vostri occhi ritrovo fiducia in me stessa anche quando manca.

Pietro, con la tua infinita curiosità e intelligenza, sei una fonte di ispirazione costante. Grazie per esserci anche senza bisogno di parlare.

Grazie anche alle mie persone di sempre, Camilla, Giulia e Alessia, e in particolare a Claudia, per aver accettato di rileggere tutto questo testo a caccia di errori. Se questo non è amore, non so che cosa sia. Grazie a Sabrina. Le nostre ore di chiacchiere (e lamentele) sul dottorato (e sulla vita) non si possono contare. Grazie per esserci sempre stata, sei stata spesso un'ancora di salvezza. Grazie anche per la tua saggezza filosofica e per esserti letta il capitolo teorico, in gran parte lo devo a te.

Finally, while numerous people have supported me in this work, all mistakes and limitations remain, of course, my own.

Contents

Introduction	1
Aims and Contributions	3
Beyond the Migratisation of Mobility.....	7
Outline	12
Chapter I: Border Externalisation to Manage Im/mobility	14
Situating the Study.....	17
Mobility and Border Externalisation in Senegal	20
Chapter II: Theoretical framework.....	29
A Decolonial Feminist Epistemology	29
Dismantling the Master's Mobility Regime	34
Chapter III: Methodology	47
Ethnography from Decolonial and Feminist Perspectives.....	47
Accessing the Field and Relating to Participants	57
Data Sources, Types and Forms	62
The Use of Narratives.....	67
Chapter IV: Desire for an Elsewhere: Imagining Im/mobility.....	73
The Imaginary of <i>Tekki</i>	75
The Imaginary of Europe.....	89
The Imaginary of Routes.....	100
Conclusions	111
Chapter V: Backdoor to Europe: Lived Experiences of Im/mobility.....	115
The Maritime Colonial Encounter: Crossing by Pirogue	118
The Terrestrial Colonial Encounter: Overland Journeys.....	136
Conclusions	181
Chapter VI: Forced Return and Im/mobility.....	185
Forced Returns from Africa.....	188
Force Returns From Europe	195
After Border Externalisation	203
Conclusions	221

Chapter VII: Motherhood, Loss, and Im/mobility..... 224
 Border Deaths and the Embodied Experience of Loss 226
 Women’s Collectives: Stories of Endurance 238
 Conclusions 260
Chapter VIII: Caravan for the Missing: Contesting Im/mobility 263
 Beyond Counting the Deaths: It’s Time to Talk About Them 266
 Seeking Justice for Forced Deaths: Who is to Blame? 278
 Fighting Oblivion: Advocating for the Missing and Their Families 289
 Reparations and Freedom of Movement 299
 Conclusions 304
Concluding reflections 307
 Towards Knowledge as Epistemic Justice 311
 Theorising Border Externalisation From Below 313
 Ways Forward..... 318
References 320
Appendix 352

Introduction

The taxi inches its way through Dakar's bustling traffic, skillfully navigating the maze of peanut vendors, pedestrians darting across the streets, and other vehicles attempting daring manoeuvres. Glancing anxiously at my phone, I realise I have only a few hours left to catch my flight, and I start wondering whether we will make it in time. "Are you heading to France?" the taxi driver, a Senegalese man in his forties, inquires. "No, I'm going to Madrid and then catching a flight to Italy." He smiles and proudly boasts his knowledge of Spain. "I know Madrid! My son arrived in Spain just a couple of days ago," he says with a sense of accomplishment. "He also departed from Dakar, from Bargny airport," he adds with a wry smile. "Oh, I did not know there was an airport in Bargny...Can you go from Bargny to Europe?" I reply with a mix of surprise and interest. "Sure," he continues with the same ironic tone, which leaves me puzzled, "Bargny it's an international airport."

Located several kilometres south of Dakar, Bargny has evolved from a fishing village into a coastal town. While it does not have an airport in the way I had imagined, the taxi driver was not completely lying. Bargny is one of the many coastal towns in Senegal where people take the sea to reach the Canary Islands in Spain. Now imagine you want to travel from Dakar to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The easiest option if you have an EU passport is to take a flight that costs approximately 300€ and typically takes around two hours. Imagine that this option is precluded to you, because you have a Senegalese passport and your visa was denied. Now you are opting for a journey from Bargny to Las Palmas on an overcrowded wooden fishing boat. The trip can be three times as expensive, lasting anywhere from five to ten days in the ocean, with no guarantee of reaching the intended destination alive. Alternatively, to reach Europe, you can undertake a perilous land journey of thousands of kilometres to North Africa, lasting months and filled with numerous challenges. Needless to say, reaching your intended destination is not guaranteed either. In all of these cases, by sitting on a comfortable aeroplane seat, on the wooden bank of a boat, or on an overcrowded vehicle across the desert, you will experience mobility and you will cross borders (or try to). However, how you experience

crossing them will be very different according to who you are: for some, borders will be barely noticeable, at best, they will be the hassle of the queue at passport control at the airport; for others, borders will materialise on their bodies, and crossing them will entail several challenges. While this form of migration by land and sea represents only a small fraction of overall movements (most so-called irregular migrants in Europe are visa overstayers, and the majority of West Africans remain within the region) it is the perception and governance of these flows that have contributed to the development of a diffuse and highly controlled Euro-Senegalese border.

In critical border studies, borders are not understood as static territorial lines but as dynamic, dispersed processes that produce and enforce social, legal, and political distinctions, creating and maintaining unequal access to mobility, freedom, rights and resources. Rather than simply marking territorial limits, borders operate as mechanisms of differentiation that regulate mobility by sorting and classifying people along lines of race, gender, class, legal status, and geopolitical origin. This sorting determines who can move where, when, how and for what purpose. It is precisely this function of filtering that produces migration not as a neutral or spontaneous movement, but as a racialised and politically regulated form of mobility, which borders are designed to manage and contain. While a European passport holder can travel between Europe and Africa freely and often visa-free, simply boarding a short flight, an African passport holder must secure a visa to enter the Schengen area and faces nearly a 50% chance of denial (Taddele Maru 2024). Confronted with these constraints, people often turn to alternative routes to reach Europe, whether by sea or land. Yet these journeys are shaped and obstructed by a diffuse infrastructure of control where European borders no longer lie solely at nation-state edges; instead, they operate as mobile governance technologies extending far beyond Europe. This phenomenon is called “border externalisation,” and it constitutes one of the most important mechanisms through which states govern mobility today. Its primary aim is to deter specific, often racialised, forms of movement allegedly directed toward the EU while operating far beyond its physical borders. It involves extraterritorial legal, economic, military, and socio-cultural measures carried out by European states, EU institutions, and public and private actors, often implemented in cooperation with African states. As such, border externalisation exemplifies how borders operate as mechanisms of differentiation, displacing exclusion, diffusing responsibility, and reproducing global hierarchies of im/mobility.

Driven by feminist curiosity, I embarked on this research project out of a deep discomfort with the glaring injustice that grants some the privilege of mobility, while others are forced to remain in place or risk their lives on perilous journeys, compelling me not only to confront this disparity, but to do so through the lived experiences of those who inhabit the borderlands.

Aims and Contributions

This dissertation examines the effects of EU border externalisation policies on those most directly impacted: people on the move, those who are returned, those who remain, and their families and communities. Centring the experiences of Senegalese people, I explore how individuals navigate the constraints imposed by border policies, the impacts on their daily lives, and the ways they resist or adapt to them. The analysis foregrounds the imaginaries, lived experiences, and practices of contestation, adaptation, and endurance among those targeted by the EU's expanding border regime. I do this by drawing on critical migration and border studies literature, and feminist decolonial epistemology. This study is guided by the following overarching research question:

How does European border externalisation shape mobility as practice among Senegalese individuals and communities?

This overarching research question is then divided into five sub-questions, each guiding one of the empirical chapters:

- Chapter IV: How do Senegalese people imagine mobility and life in Europe in a context shaped by border externalisation and influenced by gender and socio-cultural norms?
- Chapter V: How do Senegalese women and men experience border crossing in a context shaped by border externalisation across different geographies?
- Chapter VI: How do Senegalese individuals experience forced return within the broader context of border externalisation?

- Chapter VII: How do families in Senegal, especially mothers, experience the absence of loved ones caused by border externalisation?
- Chapter VIII: How does Senegalese civil society navigate and respond to deaths caused by border externalisation?

In a geopolitical context where movement is constrained by stringent mobility regimes, this research seeks to deepen our understanding of people's experiences of im/mobility, understood here as the interconnected and relational dynamics of movement and stasis shaped by power, access, and inequality (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). By examining the interplay between borders and mobility as two interconnected elements, it uncovers how mobility both precedes and exceeds forms of control, creating spaces of struggle, solidarity, resistance, and existence. While much border studies focus on borders and lived experience, this thesis argues that we should shift the gaze to mobility itself, because mobility comes first, and in doing so, it offers a new perspective on borders, mobility, and the people who are bordered, expanding what we learn about these dynamics. Rather than being solely shaped by border externalisation, the encounter between black mobility¹ and imposed borders open up new realms of action, where individuals navigate and act both in response to and independently of these borders. Focusing on these spaces, I argue, reveals a critical tension between control and freedom, mobility and immobility, structure and agency, while avoiding reductionist interpretations that either emphasise the inhumane nature of border regimes or romanticise people's agency and resistance.

Going beyond these binaries, I seek to capture the results of the interplay between movement and imposed borders, in the ways it is manifested in people's different experiences at the Euro-Senegalese borderlands. On the one

¹ Here, I draw on the concept of black mobility, developed within black and critical geographies (e.g., Cresswell 2016; Hinger 2021), to explore how movement is not only racialised but also how mobility can generate possibilities that exceed and contest imposed forms of control. I further link this to W.E.B. Du Bois's notion of the global colour line and van Houtum's (2010) concept of the global apartheid of mobility, as well as Ahmed's (2007) observation that "having the 'right' passport makes no difference if you have the wrong body or name." In this sense, blackness functions as a pre-emptive signifier of otherness, suspicion, and threat in border regimes. Black mobility, then, describes a mode of movement that is fundamentally shaped by racialisation, one that is both constrained by, and resistant to, the racialised logics of bordering.

hand, this enables me to better grasp the all pervasive nature of border externalisation that immobilises people before any border has actually been crossed, and the far reaching effects that the externalised border has on the people it seeks to immobilise and their families, friends and communities. On the other hand, by capturing these encounters, I am able to focus on people's experiences of mobility, which cannot be regarded as entirely independent of border externalisation, nor entirely determined by it. Therefore this thesis sheds light on the mobility practice that results from the clash between bordering efforts and people's desire for movement. This entails examining not just how individuals' im/mobility is influenced by border policies, but also how people navigate such conditions and the far-reaching impact on their lives. In doing so, my research aligns with the call to de-centre the study of EU border externalisation and migration more broadly (Cobarrubias et al. 2023; Zardo and Wolff 2022; Cappiali and Pacciardi 2024), moving beyond state-centred, Eurocentric, and male-dominated narratives that place states, EU institutions, and the experiences of male migrants at the centre of analysis. In line with these de-centring approaches, I foreground the micropolitical dimensions of im/mobility and the everyday agencies that emerge outside or in tension with dominant institutional frameworks, while also positioning gender as a key analytical lens. Hence, it is at the nexus of imposed border policies and people's mobility struggles that this research finds its critical potential.

To harness this critical potential more effectively, I embrace a decolonial feminist epistemology aiming to challenge the colonial, imperial, racist, capitalist, and patriarchal foundations of global systems (Verges 2019), of which the global mobility regime and border externalisation are integral parts. This is an epistemological and political choice which guides the overall research process, shaping both methodological approaches and theoretical contributions to critical border and migration studies literature, and more specifically to the subfield of border externalisation studies. Although this research is grounded at the Euro-Senegalese borderlands, the bordering logics and processes of dispossession observed here, such as struggles over rights, territory, resources, and freedom, resonate with dynamics unfolding across other parts of Africa and in the world. Therefore, while the findings are rooted in a specific context, this study speaks to the global ramifications of the ongoing injustices that impact marginalised, oppressed, and dispossessed populations everywhere.

Specifically, this research seeks to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the fields of critical border and migration studies. Theoretically, it goes beyond Eurocentrism by challenging state-centric and male-dominated narratives of unequal mobility by foregrounding the imaginaries, lived experiences, and spaces of contestation among Senegalese communities targeted by the EU's ever-expanding borderlands. By centring lived experiences of im/mobility, it brings to light the nuanced, diverse, and often contradictory agencies that emerge "from below", complicating simplistic state-centric representations that only considers one form of agency for the subalternised, offering instead a more grounded, complex account of how mobility is navigated, constrained, and reappropriated on the ground. This approach unsettles linear or binary depictions of mobility and adds depth to both critical accounts of resistance (Stierl 2019) and to vital, but potentially flattening, narratives of victimhood and violence (Lindberg 2024). In doing so, it reveals how bordering processes, and the responses they provoke on the ground, shape not only individual lives but also communities, gender relations, and the very spaces of politics.

Therefore, a second related theoretical contribution is considering the dialectic between mobility and border externalisation, positioning mobility not merely as physical movement but as a method, lens, analytical framework and lived experience. It interrogates how the political will and practice of moving under conditions of constraint shaped by border externalisation, both confronts and reconfigures the logics of border control. This dialectic foregrounds the tension between state efforts to immobilise certain bodies and the imagined, embodied and political strategies through which people enact mobility. By centering this interplay, this thesis shows how border externalisation is not only a technology of governance but also a contested terrain shaped by the very mobilities it seeks to contain and control. Specifically, I do so by conceptualising the ways in which people in Senegal meet border externalisation as *colonial encounters*, and the result of these encounters as *black mobility practice*, the socially organised, agentic ways individuals navigate and reshape movement under constraint, which takes on different dimensions (imagined, embodied, political). These theoretical concepts allow me to trace how externalisation unfolds through complex sociocultural and historical-political contexts that shape the gendered and racialised violence of mobility, experienced both individually and collectively in the borderlands. At the same time, they help illuminate the generative dimensions of these violent dynamics: how border encounters give rise to new forms of collectivity, open up socioeconomic opportunities, and foster a decolonial political consciousness that speaks back

to Europe's colonial border regime. Together, the concepts of colonial encounter and mobility practice offer a lens to understand how individuals negotiate agency within the shifting tensions between mobility and immobility under border externalisation.

Empirically, this study deepens our understanding of mobility from and through West and Central Africa, a region increasingly in focus due to rising migration to Europe through the Canary Islands and ongoing political instability marked by coups and unrest in several former European colonies (e.g., Niger, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Guinea). By focusing on the lived realities of im/mobility in Senegal, this study challenges the reductive view that mobility only becomes compelling when it involves people en route to Europe, instead centring individuals before they are labelled "migrants", and even when they may never become such. This is done by empirically shifting the geographical focus away from Europe's physical borders to the everyday spaces where border externalisation is felt: homes, villages, and communities in Senegal, thereby foregrounding those whose lives are shaped by bordering logics long before any physical movement occurs. As such, the empirical material presented in this thesis amplifies voices often marginalised in migration debates, including the voices of those who may never reach Europe, as well as the families and communities they leave behind, offering vital insights into the wider impacts of border externalisation on their lives.

Beyond the Migratisation of Mobility

Who are EU border policies exactly targeting in Senegal?

When I started this work, the answer to this question seemed rather straightforward: "the migrants!" However, as I read documents on migration-related projects implemented by the EU and international organisations in Senegal, I started identifying three main categories: migrants, returnees and Senegalese local communities. I realised that, within EU border externalisation policies, the category of "migrant" extended beyond those on the move to include "potential" migrants and "returning" migrants, encompassing those who reached Europe, those deemed likely to migrate (often anyone classified as "local populations"), and those who attempted and returned under varying conditions (classified as "returnee"). Yet, living in Senegal made me realise that the categories used failed to capture the complexity of mobility on the

ground, instead imposing simplified, normative frameworks that portrayed movement as a one-way, linear path from Africa to Europe. Many of the people I spoke with did not identify with, or simply could not be captured by, the rigid labels imposed by EU policy frameworks. For example, a long conversation with one interlocutor revealed the ambiguity of the term “migrant smuggler,” as it became clear that someone could be both a migrant and facilitate others’ movement, simultaneously fitting definitions of “migrant” and “smuggler.” Moreover, in a context like Senegal, calling someone a “migrant” or a “returnee” is often misleading, as these labels assume fixed, permanent states, while most people have a fluid and ongoing relationship with mobility. Since then, I have started to approach this issue with increased scepticism and discomfort:

Who are “the migrants” in a context where border policies target, directly or indirectly, virtually any non-white body?

During the final days of my first stay in Senegal, I found myself at a conference organised by the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, where I began to understand the answer to this question. Titled “Dakar, a City of Migration,” the event examined the city’s role as a key migration hub, presenting statistics on the main African nationalities shaping Dakar’s demographic landscape and discussing how some would eventually continue their journeys to Europe. Yet, despite this focus on migration to Dakar, there was a striking omission: the white European and North American migrants, clearly visible in the city’s upscale neighbourhoods and even among the conference attendees, were not acknowledged, revealing how the category of “migrant” constitutes a different category of human mobility which is already racialised and selectively applied (De Genova 2013). Balibar’s words resonated in my mind: “not all foreigners and not only foreigners are seen as migrants in hegemonic discourse” (Balibar in Balibar and Wallerstein 1991:221).

These reflections contribute to a growing body of critical and reflexive literature in migration and border studies that has long challenged the hierarchical categorisation of people on the move (De Genova 2013; Anderson 2017; Tudor 2018; Casas-Cortés 2021; Schapendonk 2021; Scheel & Tazzioli 2022). This scholarship shows how the knowledge produced to regulate mobility constructs certain individuals as “migrants” (Amelung, Scheel & van Reekum 2024), often through racialised, gendered, and classed logics (Anderson 2017; Tudor 2018). The term “migrant” is thus not simply a sociological category or identity; it is the outcome of legal, bureaucratic, and racialised practices of governance (Tazzioli 2019). While not all forms of

movement undergo scrutiny, migration, in this sense, becomes synonymous with suspicious or undesirable movement (Anderson 2017: 1532). This phenomenon, known as the “migratisation of mobility” (Schapendonk et al. 2018), refers to the selective framing of certain movements as problematic, creating a distinct, governable category of human mobility (De Genova 2013). Building on this, the knowledge produced about “migrants” and “migration” is often shaped by dominant assumptions that confine migration policies to control and restriction, making it nearly inconceivable to imagine policies aimed at enabling or supporting mobility, while reducing the diverse realities of people on the move to a single, static archetype, typically cast as victim, threat, or (rarely) hero, and frequently stripped of agency while rendered nearly non-human.

Besides, the terms “migrant” and “migration” tend to evoke either perpetual movement or perpetual sedentariness, failing to acknowledge that these represent merely two extremes on a continuum that encompasses a multitude of possibilities (Schapendonk 2020). On the one hand, these concepts are immediately connected with the idea of “migration as settlement”, that is, the idea that migrants travel to settle in another country (Altundal 2022). However, in my research, this notion is challenged, as nearly every person I met expressed a firm intention to return home after time spent in Europe or elsewhere. Moreover, this idea of sedentariness presupposes that movement across borders is an exception to the rule, and immobility is normal, a notion that has been debated in the literature (Sager 2018) and that ignores the impact of the imposition of colonial borders on people’s lives, especially in a context like West and Central Africa where movement is deeply embedded with pre-colonial societies (Ould Moctar 2024). On the other hand, migration is immediately characterised as physical movement between countries, ignoring the various ways in which im/mobility affects individuals without necessitating their geographical relocation, or while moving within the same country or region.

As such, the categories of “migrant” and “migration” reinforce government control and tacitly naturalize nation-states’ authority over territorial access; consequently, their persistent use, even in critical scholarship, can inadvertently “(re-)fetishise and (re-)naturalise the epistemological stability attributed to the (‘national’) state as a modular fixture of geopolitical space” (De Genova 2013a:253). If “migrants” and “migration” exist only through the state’s will to govern certain mobilities, then research that seeks to avoid complicity with this system must critically assess the knowledge it produces

and actively reimagine its terms, since the language we use shapes not only how we understand the world but also what possibilities for change we can envision or foreclose (Trouillot 1995). Throughout this research, I will therefore strive to use “migration” and “migrants” only when referring to how these terms are mobilised to control and manage certain populations. In contrast, I will use “mobility,” “travelling,” and “moving” to describe the act of movement, and terms such as “people on the move,” “travellers,” or “adventurers” to refer to those in motion. I will also use terms like “irregular,” “illegal,” or “clandestine migration” only when quoting interviewees or referencing Eurocentric categorisations (including those adopted by Senegalese themselves). This is an epistemological choice aligned with a decolonial feminist approach, which seeks to move beyond the binary oppositions that sustain a Eurocentric understanding of mobility (such as migrant/refugee, victim/threat, migrant/citizen), and to reject the migratisation of mobility that reinforces a state-centric and racist framing of black movement.

To do so, I embrace a paradigm of mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006; Ernste, Martens and Schapendonk 2012; Daley 2021; Scheel & Tazzioli 2022), where mobility signals “the act of moving, entangled with power, norms and meaning, and involving social, material, temporal and symbolic components that make movement (im)possible” (Cangia & Zittoun 2020), within the context of an increasingly oppressive externalised border regime. By shifting the gaze from the violence of the border to the liveliness of mobility, this approach allows me to prioritize individual and collective agency by capturing the diverse ways people relate to im/mobility in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands. It moves away from normative, nation-based assumptions tied to “migration” and “migrants” (Dahinden 2016), and instead seeks to personify and humanise the protagonists of this research by embracing the complexity of their choices and actions, resisting their reduction to a uniform, one-size-fits-all “migrant archetype.”

This choice is also more in line with how people in Senegal conceive of themselves and their movement, as the individuals I engaged with rarely described themselves, or their friends and family as “migrants,” nor did they refer to their movement as “migration.”² Instead, when talking about

² It is important to note that this categorisation is still used by my participants in two contexts: by activists or politicised individuals who reclaim the label “migrant” to forge a sense of identity and solidarity in their shared struggle against border violence, and when they speak to me in French, “performing” the migrant identity for a white

themselves or about someone who moved to Europe people would use the Wolof words *mbeuk mii* and *genn*, translating to “to exit” (as in, leaving) and “to face” (as in, facing the sea). These terms significantly differ from the European concept of “irregular migration,” as they suggest a sense of agency in relation to the border system.

Salif, who travelled to Europe in the early 2000s on a purchased visa and has lived in Italy ever since, starting as a street vendor and then studying to become a cultural mediator, explained that in Senegal, people don’t speak of “travel” when referring to the migratory journey, they speak of “exiting”:

“You (Europeans) travel, we exit. There is no travel agency for illegal travels! There is a fundamental difference between the two: exiting and traveling. When you ask about a merchant in Senegal who works in the UAE, people say he has been ‘travelling’ for a few years. But when you ask about your neighbour who has emigrated to Europe, they say ‘he’s exited.’ So, it’s clearly a matter of privilege. Those who can travel, like you, travel; those who can’t, like me, exit.”

He explains that the concept of “exiting” is similar to the Maghrebian term *harraga* which means “to burn the border.” Towards the end of our conversation Salif further comments on the power hierarchies inherent in the kind of language we use:

“People talk a lot about migration, but we should talk about mobility, because migration is implicitly a racist term. Why is an American coming to Italy not considered a migrant, but I am?”

As Salif’s words perfectly capture, language is important as it shapes both the lived experience of mobility and the way it is understood and categorized across different contexts. Echoing Salif’s reasoning, embracing a mobility paradigm, therefore, means moving away from the racialised structures

European researcher. However, my choice to avoid this label is informed by both the context of my research, where most participants do not identify themselves as migrants, and my positionality, as the label “migrant” often carries connotations of control and dehumanisation for a white European.

inherent in the terms “migrants” and “migration.” It reframes black mobility not merely as a reaction to border constraints, but as a way of asserting agency in the face of unequal power dynamics designed to limit people’s movements and rights. Moreover, discussing mobility instead of migration underscores that mobility is a broader concept that does not inherently assume a sense of permanency. In this context, it enables me to encompass political, imagined, and embodied mobilities as integral components of the interaction between individuals and border externalisation. Ultimately, as the “contestation over the definition of political concepts is rarely the result of a purely intellectual exercise happening in a political vacuum” (Clavé-Mercier and Wuth 2024: 8), the decision to go beyond the migratisation of mobility is a deeply political stance that involves rejecting the categorisation, domination and control imposed upon certain people’s movement. Through this focus on mobility, the lived experiences presented in this thesis reveal the limitations of normative concepts like migration and borders and instead demonstrate how mobility can offer a pathway to decolonise the study and knowledge production within migration and border studies (Vanyoro 2024).

Outline

This thesis is organised as follows. Chapter I introduces the context of the study by first situating it within the existing literature on border externalisation from Africa to the EU, and then delving into the specific aspects of mobility and borders in Senegal. Consistent with decolonial approaches to border externalisation that challenge its ahistoricisation and presentism (Ould Moctar, 2024; Cobarrubias & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2025), this chapter seeks to situate Senegal’s mobility and border history within broader colonial trajectories, aiming to “decenter and re-historicise dominant Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies that shape our understanding of contemporary migration and border control” (Cobarrubias & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2025:1). Chapter II outlines the theoretical contributions of the thesis. Grounded in decolonial feminist epistemology, and employing an abductive approach that moves between theory and fieldwork, it theorises the concepts of colonial encounters, black mobility practice, and its imagined, embodied, and political dimensions. These concepts constitute the theoretical foundation of the thesis and provide the lens through which the empirical material will be analysed. Chapter III presents the methodology, focusing on a decolonial and feminist ethnographic

approach to data collection and analysis. The remaining five chapters of the thesis address the research questions by focusing each on a distinct type of encounter and the unique experiences that emerge within the practice of black mobility. Chapter IV explores the encounter between border externalisation and people's will for mobility, focusing on how these forces interact and shape imagination and imaginaries of mobility. It examines how people's will for mobility is shaped by both subjective imagination, such as the longing for a better life, and socio-cultural constructs of success and imaginaries of Europe as a land of opportunities. Additionally, the chapter highlights the gendered nature of these mobility imaginaries and investigates how these mental constructs influence real-world mobility experiences. Building on Chapter IV, Chapter V focuses on the lived experience of mobility during the actual process of border crossing. It examines what mobility looks like for Senegalese people in the face of increasingly restrictive border policies, following individual and collective stories of near-border encounters, exploring experiences of mobility both within Senegal and en route through North Africa, including countries such as Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia. It also focuses on how gender shapes people's encounter with border restrictions. Chapter VI examines the encounter between mobility and border externalisation in the context of forced returns from both Africa and Europe. It highlights the violent structural dimensions of forced (backward) mobility, while also exploring the socio-cultural dynamics that shape return and the diverse ways in which people reappropriate and navigate it. Chapters VII and VIII examine the impact of border externalisation on the broader Senegalese population, highlighting how these policies have a diffuse effect that extends beyond individuals who physically cross borders. Specifically, they shift the focus from individual direct encounters with the border, to the encounters families and communities have with border externalisation through the loss of loved ones. Chapter VII explores the emotional and social toll on families, especially mothers and wives, who have lost loved ones in the perilous journey to Europe, and how this suffering is transformed into tools of resilience and resistance. In doing so, it explores the gendered nature of the encounter with border externalisation and its gender impacts on those who do not travel. Chapter VIII looks at how Senegalese civil society engages with border externalisation, focusing on an initiative led by a group of activists with families of the missing to politicise border deaths and honour those lost. This chapter illustrates the role of open public resistance in challenging externalisation policies and shifting the Eurocentric discourse around migration and border control through focusing on migrants' deaths.

Chapter I: Border Externalisation to Manage Im/mobility

In the last few decades, border externalisation has emerged in Europe (and beyond) as one of the preferred mechanisms to manage unwanted mobility (Spijkerboer 2022). It can be defined as the wide set of diverse policies, practices, physical structures, institutions, narratives and values whose ultimate goal is to control, restrain, filter and halt the mobility of some individuals as they are still outside the territory of the EU. The starting point of border externalisation is a deliberate misrepresentation that people on the move are directed to Europe and that they have the potential to destabilise the continent if they are not stopped (Moyo 2022: 70). In this sense, border externalisation can be thought of as a complementary measure to migration management that happens at the territorial boundaries of the EU and within its territory. The most obvious example of border externalisation is the visa system which shifts a state's borders into another state's territory, where people's prospective mobility is pre-emptively assessed. This is the case of EU consulates on African soil, which act as the most institutionalised form of European borders displaced within the African territory (Achiume 2022).

However, border externalisation is much more pervasive than visas alone, and targets black bodies wherever they are: before they attempt to move (e.g. what the EU defines as “potential migrants”), while they move (e.g. what the EU defines as “irregular migrants”), after they go back (e.g. what the EU defines as “returnees”), and even when they do not intend to move (e.g. their family and friends). In doing so, border externalisation manages people's movement according to Eurocentric ideas and values around mobility, categorising populations into those who can freely move and those who cannot (Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias 2019; Van Houtum 2010). Externalisation reimagines borders not as fixed lines between nation-states but as dispersed management strategies that extend control over migration to the very places where so-called

“potential migrants” live, redefining the border as a mobile apparatus of governance (De Genova, Mezzadra, & Pickles 2015: 19).

In practice, the externalisation of border and migration control comprises at least three approaches: security, humanitarianism and development. The security approach is the most visible one and consists of traditional border control practices concerned with defending and securing territory from the entrance of illegalised subjects. These measures encompass various initiatives, such as maritime or land border control operations, financial support to the border police of third states, and the distribution of funds and equipment to both state and non-state actors to control the border. These efforts aim to fortify the external borders of the EU, involving activities like the implementation of advanced radar surveillance, the construction of physical barriers, and the establishment of detention facilities, among others. The second approach is called humanitarian borderwork (Pallister-Wilkins 2022) and indicates both the ways in which humanitarian concerns for saving lives have entered the realm of border policing, as well as the ways humanitarian actors are now increasingly present at the border to save lives and alleviate the suffering caused by the violence of the EU border regime. The third approach is called “soft externalisation,” or “preventive externalisation,” and shifts control modalities to the socio-economic sphere by using the language of development aid (Gazzotti 2021) and socio-economic incentives to change the factors that (allegedly) influence people’s decision to move (Boswell 2003). This approach, institutionalised in Europe through the 2015 Valletta Summit and the European Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), undergirded by a pre-emptive logic, consists of implementing development cooperation projects, but also public campaigns and civil society initiatives to discourage so-called irregular migration by, among others, warning about its risks and promoting local alternatives to make a living. The idea behind this “root causes” approach (Thorburn 1996) is to stop unwanted mobility at its supposed “source” by creating “territorially bound development opportunities” (Zanker 2019:13) and by promoting a narrative of sedentarism based on the “right to remain” (Hyndman and Mountz 2008). Security, humanitarianism, and development approaches are deeply interconnected, as they all aim to achieve the same objective, curbing unwanted mobility, though they do so through different, yet complementary, means.

Returns, whether forced or voluntary, are also a core component of mobility governance and a key mechanism within the architecture of border externalisation (Marino 2023; Gaibazzi 2024; Korvensyrjä 2025), as they

require the active involvement of third countries for authorising repatriations through recognition procedures, travel permits, or reintegration incentives. Returns operate through overlapping securitarian, humanitarian, and developmental logics. Forced returns rely on a securitarian framing, marking individuals as “illegal” and “threatening” and asserting that they must be removed to restore order. Voluntary returns, often only nominally voluntary (e.g. Marino 2023), are justified through a humanitarian lens, presented as rescue operations for people stranded in precarious conditions along the way. A developmental logic further frames returnees as agents of progress, expected to contribute to their countries of origin once returned. Importantly, forced returns are not limited to Europe. People on the move are increasingly subject to deportation from other African states, pressured to act as Europe’s external border control agents under externalisation agreements.

Against this backdrop, border externalisation implies both a spatial displacement of the border outside of the territory of the EU, as well as the outsourcing of border control functions to a wide range of actors. These span from consulates and embassies to the police and authorities of other countries, as well as private actors such as airline, transport, tech companies, and civil society organisations and NGOs, to name a few. In this context, while the origins of these policies lie in the EU’s deep concern with controlling mobility, and while the EU often leverages political and economic incentives to pressure African states into containing their own populations, it is essential to recognise that their implementation is not driven by the EU and its member states alone. Rather than being unilaterally imposed, these policies emerge through dynamic, negotiated interactions between the EU, its member states, and African governments, who reinterpret externalisation according to their own political interests, priorities, and constraints, making it a co-produced and context-specific phenomenon. In the Euro-Senegalese borderlands, border externalisation cannot be seen simply as a continuation of colonial domination, nor as entirely separate from it; rather, it constitutes a contested terrain where overlapping and uneven forms of power coexist and intersect, and where attempts at controlling migration clash with forms of resistance, reappropriation and insubordination.

Situating the Study

Over the past two decades, as the European Union has intensified efforts to control its external borders, interdisciplinary scholarship on border and migration control has expanded significantly. This proliferation has led some scholars to suggest that border externalisation now constitutes a field of study in its own right (Cobarrubias et al., 2023). As I outline below, this body of work has largely developed along two main strands: research that examines externalisation from the perspective of states, and research that explores it through the lens of non-state actors. More recently, both strands have seen promising, though still limited, engagements with decolonial (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2018; Cobarrubias et al., 2023; Ould Moctar, 2024; Cobarrubias & Lemberg-Pedersen, 2025) and feminist approaches (Pacciardi & Cappiali 2024), in an attempt to go beyond Eurocentric frameworks that necessarily underpin the EU border regime (c.f. Ould Moctar 2024; Casas Cortes and Cobarrubias 2019). By foregrounding the agency and experiences of men and women within a border regime shaped by colonial dynamics and legacies in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands, my research engages with and contributes to this emerging body of scholarship.

The literature on externalisation is most developed in relation to the role of the EU and European states in this process, which reflects both the state-centric and Eurocentric orientation of the discipline. Seminal work has analysed the ways in which European states have gradually moved beyond traditional migration control policies by relying on cooperation with neighbouring countries, giving rise to debates on borders, sovereignty, territoriality, EU foreign and security policy, and migrants' human rights (Boswell 2003; Zolberg 2003; Zaiotti 2007; Lavenex 2008; Bigo and Guild 2010; Białasiewicz 2012). In addition, a rich scholarship has shed light on the ways in which externalisation policies differentiate and filter wanted and unwanted forms of mobilities, and hierarchically categorise countries and populations (Casas-Cortes et al. 2011; 2015; Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias 2019; Van Houtum 2010; Boedeltje and Van Houtum 2011; De Genova 2013; 2018; Casaglia and Pacciardi 2022). As border externalisation involves the interaction between the EU (or its member states) and so-called “third countries,” some contributions have then examined how these policies are negotiated, contested or reappropriated by African countries (Paoletti 2010; Reslow 2012; Wolff 2014; Chou and Gibert 2017; Gaibazzi et al. 2017; Laube 2019).

By documenting African countries' responses to EU policies, some authors move beyond Eurocentric accounts of border externalisation, challenging portrayals of African states as passive actors and complicating narratives of power as flowing unilaterally from Europe southward. Cassarino (2018), for instance, emphasizes how North African countries have leveraged border control efficiency and strategic alliances with Western powers to assert their own agendas. Similarly, El Qadim and Isleyen (in Cobarrubias et al. 2023) contest the reduction of non-EU countries to mere subordinate partners or financial opportunists, instead examining their domestic and foreign policy motivations, bargaining power, and diplomatic strategies. Empirical contributions further illustrate how African states navigate, negotiate, or even resist the EU's externalisation agenda (El Qadim 2014, 2018; Adam et al. 2020, Gazzotti 2021; Ould Moctar 2024, Jegen 2023). Additionally, a small but significant body of scholarship within state-centred analyses of border externalisation further advances a non-Eurocentric lens by revealing how race and gender operate as central mechanisms of inferiorisation and control in EU external migration policies (e.g., Stachowitsch & Sachseder 2019; Gyan Addo et al. 2020; Sachseder et al. 2022).

Resisting the state-centric focus of the literature discussed above, another strand embraces the decentralisation turn in the study of EU border externalisation (Cuttitta 2020; Triandafyllidou 2022; Zardo and Wolff 2022), shifting attention from states to the diverse roles of non-state actors, such as private security firms, NGOs, civil society groups, border guards, international organisations, labour brokers, and smugglers, in shaping externalisation by constraining, facilitating, or assisting migrants' mobility (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sørensen 2013; Andersson 2014; Lavenex 2016; Cuttitta 2020a; Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022). Within this stream of research, only a small body of work has tried to move beyond Eurocentrism, by examining how external border policies are rooted in colonial power dynamics and legacies. For example, Stambøl and Jegen (2022) trace colonial continuities between EU border externalisation and historical public-private partnerships in West Africa, while Ould Moctar (2020; 2024) grounds analyses of externalisation within the histories of colonialism and neoliberal capital exploitation, engaging with those at the outer end of externalisation processes.

Within the decentralisation turn in border externalisation, another strand of the literature focuses on people on the move as active subjects who resist, confront, and negotiate border externalisation (Stock et al. 2019; Savio-Vammen et al.

2021; Ould Moctar 2024), with some studies notably engaging with the racialised dimensions of these experiences (Gazzotti 2021a; Gross-Wyrtzen and El Yacoubi 2022). Most of these accounts continue to rely on a disembodied figure of “the migrant,” implicitly equated with a young, single, able-bodied man (Stock 2012: 1579; see also Andersson 2014). While this reflects the male-dominated patterns of mobility in contexts like West Africa (Mazzucato et al. 2015), the marginalisation of women’s voices, and the absence of a broader gendered perspective, risks undermining this literature’s potential to move beyond Eurocentrism and fully decenter dominant narratives.

Last but not least, a growing feminist literature in border externalisation has foregrounded gender, along with race, as a key analytical lens to expose and challenge the racialised and gendered dynamics of externalisation through the voices and agencies of women (Bosworth et al. 2018; Schmoll 2020; Tyszler 2019; 2023; Freedman et al. 2023; Chemlali 2023; 2024). Grounded in feminist ethnographic research, these studies highlight how women carve out spaces of agency, both large and small, even within the constraints of violent bordering practices. Schmoll (2020), for example, explores how women reclaim subjectivity and autonomy in ways that centre desire, emotion, and relationality, while Tyszler (2019; 2023) deconstructs the dominant frames that cast women on the move solely as victims or maternal figures. Freedman et al. (2023) further explore how gendered border experiences intersect with other axes of domination such as race and class, and Chemlali (2023; 2024) and Stock (2012) traces how women stuck in Tunisia and Morocco reassert mobility and agency in everyday contexts shaped by the EU border regime.

Within the broader decentralising turn in border externalisation literature that seeks to go beyond Eurocentrism, my contribution lies in decentering the state by focusing on those directly affected (people on the move, their families, civil society actors, and Senegalese communities more broadly) and in challenging male-centric tendencies by foregrounding gendered perspectives and amplifying women’s voices and experiences, whether they are on the move or not.

Mobility and Border Externalisation in Senegal

As we are drinking *attaya* (traditional Senegalese tea) after lunch, Bocar, a young man who I met after his last attempt at border crossing into Europe, teaches me a Senegalese proverb in Wolof. “*Ku dul tukki do xam fu deck nexee*,” he says, “those who do not travel do not know the taste of travel, where life is good.” According to him, these words highlight the deep cultural value placed on mobility in Senegalese society, where many still hold travel in the highest regard (c.f. Mbodji 2008). Situated at the Western edge of the African continent, Senegal’s geography makes it a crossroads of mobility, linking Mauritania to the North, Mali to the East, and Guinea-Conakry and Guinea-Bissau to the South. Senegal also features an extensive coastline along the Atlantic Ocean, which forms its western border from where people depart to reach the Canary Islands, which lie approximately 2,000 kilometres away. From a Eurocentric point of view that considers black mobility threatening when it is Europe-bound (Ould Moctar 2024), Senegal’s position, as well as the relatively lively mobility of its population, makes it a country of so-called origin. Indeed, emigration from Senegal is significant, with approximately one-tenth of its population living abroad (Sinatti 2014). Yet, about half of Senegalese travellers move to other West African destinations, including Mauritania, The Gambia, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, and Niger (Deshingkar & Gueye 2022). In addition to these regional destinations, leading non-African host countries for Senegalese travellers include France, Italy, Spain and Belgium (Mensah, Teye, and Boatemaa Setrana 2002). Senegal is also a destination country, with the majority of its African migrant population coming from neighboring countries such as Guinea-Conackry, Mali, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau, with Mauritians representing the largest group of refugees in the country (Ndione 2018). Within a Eurocentric view on mobility, however, Senegal is also viewed as a transit country, where people from neighbouring regions transit through it to reach Europe from its coasts.

Hence, despite the absence of a direct physical border between Senegal and the EU, this borderland emerges as a pivotal case in the examination of border externalisation. This is underscored by prominent externalisation efforts within EU initiatives, both at the EU level and by individual member states, notably Spain, that intensively secure maritime and land routes through substantial police deployment and significant investment in border monitoring. To this, we must add the countless development and humanitarian projects that wish to stop unwanted mobility at its “source.” Moreover, Senegal stands out as a

compelling case for examining border externalisation in practice, not only because of the surge in arrivals to the Canary Islands in 2023, which has redirected attention and funding toward the country, but also because the daily workings of externalisation here shed light on a crucial yet less examined border zone (but see Andersson 2014; Frowd 2018; Ould Moctar 2024), whereas most of the literature has focused on North Africa.

Before the Border: Pre-Colonial and Colonial Histories of Mobility

While becoming an interesting case for examining mobility from West Africa to the EU in the last few decades, Senegal has a long history of mobility since precolonial times (Mensah, Teye and Setrana 2022), when goods, services, and people circulated relatively freely within the West African region (Ndione, 2018). In precolonial times, mobility in present day Senegal interested particularly the Haalpulaar, the Soninké (Tall and Tandian 2011) and the Mandé (Niane 1998) driven by the expansion of the Ghanaian and Malian Empires and Senegal's central role in the trans-Saharan trade network (Jegen 2020). Colonial conquest, like elsewhere on the continent, profoundly impacted regional mobility by artificially dividing territories and populations that once belonged to the same ethnic groups, as in the case of the Wolof, the majority ethnic group in Senegal and The Gambia. The slave trade also significantly influenced mobility patterns, as nearly 60% of all slaves transported across the Atlantic came from West Africa, with European traders purchasing slaves in the Senegambia region and forcibly moving them outside of the continent (Cross 2013). The French colonial economy, centred on groundnut plantations, further shaped regional mobility (Cross 2013), as low-paid labour from the interior of Senegal and other French West African colonies migrated to work these fields (Jegen 2020). This intra-regional mobility was further fuelled by high taxes imposed by the colonial administration that pushed some people, notably the Soninké, to seek revenues outside their territories (Mdobji 2008).

Colonial times not only shaped mobility as a survival strategy, still visible in contemporary movement patterns within Senegal and across its borders but also cultivated a powerful symbolic culture of migration as a rite of passage (Cross, 2013). This is evident in the description of workers on colonial plantations, whose mobility, according to Cheikh Anta Diop, “represented a transitory stage in the life of a young unmarried man, who would engage in this monotonous seasonal work in order to return and marry” (in Cross, 2013: 49). This idea, as we will see, remains deeply present in the aspirations of many

young Senegalese today. Moreover, the exile of Cheikh Amadou Bamba, banished by the French for resisting colonial rule and later becoming the leader of the Mourides (Nyamnjoh 2016), the most prominent Sufi Islamic brotherhood in Senegal, was instrumental in shaping the cultural meanings of mobility echoed in the Senegalese proverb cited by Bocar above. For the Mourides, travel continues to hold an almost spiritual significance, reinforcing the moral and ritual dimensions of movement described by Cheikh Anta Diop. This underscores how, for many Senegalese, mobility has long been embedded as an intrinsic value, rooted in both precolonial and colonial histories.

Colonial times not only shaped the socio-cultural meanings attached to travel but also forged mobility trajectories that created lasting interdependencies between Senegal and Europe, notably France (Tall 2008; Mbodji 2008; Mourre 2018). During both World War I and II, West Africans, including Senegalese, moved to France as they were recruited into the merchant marine and in the French army (Beauchemin et al. 2018). In the post-war period, France established recruitment offices in the Senegal River Valley to meet labour demands for its growing industries, promoting circular mobility where Senegalese workers spent a few years in France before returning home (Beauchemin et al. 2018). The Soninké communities living near the present-day borders with Mauritania and Mali, were among the first Senegalese to migrate to France during the colonial period, eventually becoming a regular part of the French workforce (Mbodji 2008). In light of this, mobility from Senegal to Europe, which began as forced migration during colonial times and continued since, have strongly contributed to the normalisation of mobility to Europe across generations (Diop 2008) and in forging a strong “culture of migration” (Hahn and Klute 2007) deeply embedded within communities and families.

By situating present-day mobilities within colonial-era patterns, without reducing them to mechanical continuities or culturally fixed traits of certain populations (Timera 2001), we can develop a deeper understanding that challenges presentist views of migration as a recent phenomenon. This perspective highlights how colonial histories have not only established enduring dependencies between former colonies and colonial powers but have also shaped specific imaginaries and practices of movement toward Europe, embedded within the country’s socio-cultural and economic fabric.

Post-Colonial Borders: Stopping Black Mobility, Securing Europe

While colonial borders divided ethnic groups and vast territories into separate nation-states, mobility continued to remain a valued practice in the post-colonial era, with the right to migration enshrined in the Senegalese constitution (Zanker 2023). In the immediate aftermath of Senegal's independence in 1960, migration to Europe, particularly to France, primarily took place through regular channels. However, by the 1970s, following the global oil crises which triggered high unemployment and economic stagnation, and amidst rising anti-immigrant sentiment fuelled by the growing influence of far-right parties such as Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National, France began to impose increasing restrictions on non-European migrants workers, including Senegalese nationals. This marked a shift from earlier colonial-era mobilities and postcolonial labour needs toward more exclusionary immigration policies, prompting a gradual shift in mobility patterns of the Senegalese working force towards destinations like Italy, which saw an increase in Senegalese labour migration during the 1970s and 1980s (Ndione 2018). However, by the 1990s all EU countries gradually restricted mobility for non-EU citizens, prioritising territorial protection and adopting protectionist migration policies (Kwaku et al. 2022). During this period, the EU intensified its economic and political integration, notably through the Schengen Agreement, which eliminated internal borders and enshrined free movement as a foundational European principle. At the same time, the strengthening of external borders was advanced under the banner of security and migration management, with the "external dimension" of EU migration policy formally introduced at the Tampere Council in 1999 (Lavenex and Uçarer 2004). This approach has been pursued both at the bilateral level, with individual member states negotiating agreements with so-called "sending" and "transit" countries, and at the EU level. Importantly, as Vives (2017:4) notes, "bilateral and multi-lateral agreements run in parallel and tended to build on each other," which implies that when examining border externalisation policies, distinguishing between initiatives at the member state level and those at the EU level is often difficult and counterproductive. Central to the creation of Schengen, was the creation of the EU visa list, which detailed the nationalities required to obtain a visa in order to avoid being automatically classified as "irregular" upon entry in EU territory (Collinson 1996). This list overwhelmingly targeted countries ranked lowest on the UN Human Development Index, effectively subjecting entire populations to mobility restrictions designating over one hundred countries, among which Senegal, as "migration risks" based on economic and security

considerations (Statewatch 2023). This moment marks, in many ways, one of the first concrete instances of border externalisation as we know it today.

Such restrictions on movement came at a time in which economic hardships in Senegal driven by neoliberal policies and a general lack of governmental support, prompted many to look for a better future abroad. In particular, from the 1970s through the late 1980s living conditions in Senegal significantly deteriorated due to the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs, extensive currency devaluations, and public service retrenchments (Mensah, Teye and Setrana 2022: 246). Under the conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank, the government was forced to withdraw subsidies for essential services such as healthcare, education, water, and electricity. As a result of the privatisation of state-run industries and public utilities and the liberalisation of import trade (Rodriguez 2015), GDP declined and unemployment rose, affecting even those with higher education (Mensah, Teye and Setrana 2022) leading to a significant reduction in income-generating opportunities. Moreover, as agriculture became less profitable due to poor soil fertility and the government's withdrawal of support for agricultural development programs, especially the groundnut economy (Mbodj 1993), many individuals began migrating from rural areas to urban centres such as Dakar and Saint-Louis (Tandian and Tall 2010). In these cities, they often found work in the informal sector or joined the ranks of the unemployed, resulting in precarious living conditions. At the same time, the coastal towns, which have traditionally hosted fishing communities that rely on fish as a vital dietary and economic resource, faced a major crisis (Uwazuruike 2023) attributed to multiple factors, among which the depletion of fish stocks caused by environmental issues (Gascuel et al. 2002), state regulations reshaping traditional fishing practices, the presence of foreign ships from Europe, China, and Russia that deplete local fish resources (Sall and Morand 2008) and increasingly higher fuel prices and expensive engines (Tall and Tandian 2011). At the same time, the drastic 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, whose value remains under French control until today, severely weakened purchasing power for Senegalese families. In the wake of this economic crisis, and amid the tightening of EU borders for Senegalese citizens, many small-scale fishermen, who had previously engaged in local fishing, began repurposing their boats for migration, attempting the perilous journey to the Canary Islands.

Outsourcing Exclusion: EU Border externalisation in Senegal

Between 2005 and 2006, approximately 30,000 people from West Africa, the majority of whom were fishermen, arrived in the Canary Islands aboard the very boats they had once used for fishing in search of a better life in Europe. Although most of them were immediately repatriated, this surge in unauthorised arrivals to the Canary Islands prompted the EU and Spain to adopt emergency border externalisation measures, intensifying control through coercion, advanced surveillance, and coordinated operations under Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Carrera 2007) who had been established just a few years earlier. In May 2006, at Spain's request, the EU, in collaboration with Senegal, Mauritania, and The Gambia, launched the Frontex-led operation Hera I, which involved aircrafts and boats patrolling the waters between the West African coasts and the Canary Islands, aiming to intercept people at sea before they entered into Spanish waters. This represents the second important phase of border externalisation in Senegal, following the tightening of visa policies. The operation was subsequently extended into Hera II and Hera III, continuing until 2007. Given the highly sensitive and controversial nature of such bilateral agreements, Senegal did not accept them lightly. Instead, the country leveraged the agreement by demanding a list of conditions, including development aid, in exchange for its role in acting as an EU border patrol partner (Carrera 2007; Andersson 2014). The negotiation of stricter border controls in exchange for aid marks a key turning point in the trajectory of border externalisation in Senegal, continuing to shape policies to this day.

During this early period of externalisation, Senegal was subjected to significant legal and political pressure from European actors, resulting in bilateral agreements on migration with France and Spain (Agne 2022). Notably, during the early 2000s the Spanish Guardia Civil officers started patrolling Senegalese land and sea borders. As a result of international pressures on curbing migration flows, Senegal further adopted Law No. 2005-06 on combating trafficking in persons and related practices, which effectively criminalised irregular migration by implicitly establishing the offense of "organised clandestine emigration" (Agne 2022) and imposing fines and prison sentences of up to 10 years on smugglers (Vives 2017). This law mirrored EU language of criminalisation of irregular migration, effectively equating migrant smuggling with human trafficking. As a result, the law not only failed to distinguish between undocumented migrants and those facilitating their departure (Lagrange 2017: 24), but by adopting Eurocentric

categories, it overlooked the complex reality of unauthorised mobility from Senegal, where the distinctions between “migrants” and “smugglers” are often blurred (Agne 2022).

Yet, Senegal has not always complied with European pressures on border control cooperation. As the governance of mobility from Africa became an increasing priority, the EU attempted, in 2009, to establish a Mobility Partnership with Senegal (Chou & Gilbert 2012). These agreements included a clause on readmission, which became a major point of contention and ultimately led to a halt in negotiations. Return agreements are, in fact, politically inconvenient for Senegal, as accepting involuntary returns offers little political gain while imposing economic and sovereignty costs, especially given the country’s constitutional commitment to migration and heavy reliance on remittances, which far exceed development aid. While Senegal has always allowed EU border guards to patrol its coasts, to this day it remains reluctant to formalise return agreements, adopting a “cherry-picking” strategy by accepting EU funding without fully committing to return collaboration, and sometimes even resisting such initiatives (Mouthaan 2019). At the time of writing, bilateral return agreements are in place with Spain, France, and Italy (Jegen, 2020), and returns also occur from Belgium (Rodriguez 2023) and Germany.

After an initial emergent phase of border externalisation driven by immediate security concerns related to the so-called “migration crisis” in the Canary Islands, border externalisation in Senegal shifted towards a more development-oriented approach following the 2015 Valletta Summit. This shift was marked by the establishment of the European Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), with Senegal being identified as one of the five priority countries in the EU-Africa partnership on migration and receiving substantial funding. While framed in the developmental language and “root causes approach” typical of EUTF (Pacciardi 2024), these projects primarily focused on managing and containing migration, with 92% of the funds allocated to migration management projects, including reducing migration flows, promoting voluntary return, and strengthening security measures (CEAR, 2022). Under the EUTF, EU funds in Senegal support efforts to curb migration to Europe by financing employment-oriented training, awareness-raising campaigns on the risks of irregular migration, and strengthened border controls. For example, the historically fluid border between Mauritania and Senegal, especially in the towns of Rosso Mauritania and Rosso Senegal, has been transformed into a highly surveilled zone, where the EU has funded

border police training and surveillance equipment since at least 2015 (Ould Moctar 2024). The International organisation for Migration (IOM) has also been central to EU-funded efforts to reinforce Senegal's borders. The once-porous Senegal-Gambia border shaped by colonial legacies and kinship ties (Khan 2019), has become increasingly regulated, with IOM inaugurating a border post in 2022 to "strengthen border management" (IOM 2022). Similarly, along the Senegal-Mali border, known for trade and pastoralist mobility, IOM implemented EU-backed projects in 2019 to build checkpoints and "improve border management" (IOM 2019).

Within the framework of the EUTF, and with the technical and financial support of IOM, the Senegalese government began drafting the *Politique Nationale de Migration du Sénégal* (PNMS), thereby further advancing a securitised migration control agenda (Jegen, 2020), evident in how the PNMS almost exclusively focuses on discouraging unauthorised migration, rather than promoting legal mobility. In 2018, as part of a European-funded regional initiative reflecting the broader strategy of counter-smuggling measures embedded in the EU's external migration agenda, Senegal undertook a reform of its legal framework on smuggling and trafficking (Jegen 2025). In July 2023, Senegal also launched the *Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre la Migration Irrégulière* (SNLMI), prioritising border control, awareness campaigns, and reintegration programs (Gouvernement du Sénégal 2023). While Frontex established a risk analysis cell in Senegal to monitor cross-border crimes in 2019 (Frontex 2019), it was not until 2022 that the EU and Senegal began negotiating a Status Agreement, which would grant Frontex unprecedented executive authority in a third country not bordering an EU member state (EU Parliament Report, 2024). While the then Senegalese president Macky Sall initially seemed open to this proposal, strong resistance from civil society (e.g. Savio Vammen 2024), led to a rejection of the Status Agreement. Negotiation for a working arrangement similar to the one negotiated with Mauritania (Ould Moctar 2024), is still ongoing at the time of the writing. In October 2024, the Spanish government requested Frontex to seek permission to patrol the coasts of several West African countries, including Senegal, to support local efforts in strengthening border control and facilitating returns. Despite campaign promises of greater autonomy from European agendas, the newly elected Senegalese government under President Bassirou Diomaye Faye reaffirmed its commitment to border externalisation by welcoming Spanish President Pedro Sánchez in summer 2024, thereby maintaining the EU's securitised and criminalising approach to migration. While the development of a securitised migration policy in Senegal can be

understood as a response to European pressure, it should also be seen as part of successive Senegalese governments' efforts to present the country as a reliable partner, thereby embedding border externalisation within national political strategies (Vives 2017).

Chapter II: Theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework guiding my analysis. I begin by exploring how a decolonial feminist epistemology can enrich research on borders and mobility. Rather than offering a fixed definition of “decolonial feminism,” and in recognition of the plurality of decolonial feminist approaches, I adopt a situated understanding shaped by the specific context of my research, drawing particularly on the concept of coloniality to illuminate the neocolonial dimensions of externalised border regimes. Grounded in this decolonial feminist epistemological approach, the second part of this chapter introduces two key concepts, *colonial encounters* and *black mobility practice*. Developed through observations, interviews, and situated engagement in the field, these concepts reflect how decolonial feminist thought is mobilised theoretically to make sense of lived experiences of border externalisation. Colonial encounters describe the clash between people’s will to move and the constraints imposed by border externalisation, highlighting how these encounters extend beyond border crossings into everyday life, all situated within the historical and socio-cultural context of the Euro-Senegalese borderlands. From these encounters arises black mobility practice, which foregrounds the specific ways those targeted by border externalisation are affected and respond. These two interconnected concepts guide my empirical analysis across Chapters IV to VIII: each chapter explores a distinct form of colonial encounter, while the narratives shared by my interlocutors reveal how these encounters produce different expressions of black mobility practice.

A Decolonial Feminist Epistemology

Rooted in critical and emancipatory traditions, decolonial feminism is an approach that brings together decolonial and feminist theories to challenge hegemonic interpretations of the social world, exposing how patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist systems of oppression are interconnected and mutually

reinforcing. Such an approach seeks to “rehumanise the world, breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanise subjects and communities” by “producing counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that can dismantle coloniality and open up multiple other forms of being in the world” (Maldonado-Torres 2016:10). When adopted in research on border externalisation, decolonial feminism enables questioning the colonial and patriarchal roots of current mobility systems and reframing academic conversations in ways that align with social justice, self-determination, and freedom from oppression.

More specifically, decolonial feminist research can be defined as an epistemological endeavour that addresses the hegemony of Eurocentrism in academic knowledge production and contests concepts of universal reason and scientific rationality (Smith 2012). Eurocentrism, as coined by Samir Amin (1988; cf. Amin, 2009), refers to a worldview rooted in Europe’s capitalist history and colonial expansion, which elevates white European experiences and values as universal standards, the pinnacle of “development” and “civilisation” that all other societies are expected to emulate (Sarr 2016). This ideology underpins binary distinctions such as centre/periphery, developed/underdeveloped, and civilised/uncivilised, dichotomies that continue to shape, among other things, much knowledge on migration and mobility. Eurocentric hegemony can be considered as a form of “epistemic violence” (Smith 2012; Spivak 2010), which reveals a complicity of research with systems of global oppressions (Harding 2006). As such, decolonial feminism provides a non-Eurocentric framework for analysing power relations rooted in colonial histories and sustained through ongoing (neo)colonial and imperial structures, while offering epistemological tools to critique and disrupt them. Here, I build on the decolonial and postcolonial traditions (Fanon 2004; wa Thiong’o 1986; Quijano 2000; Mbembe 2001, 2021; Wynter 2003; Lugones 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Sarr 2016; Tamale 2020), paying specific attention to approaches that are sensitive to the intersection of race and gender in the formation and perpetuation of systems of oppression³ (Thiam 1978; Anzaldúa 1987; Oyěwùmí 1997; Mohanty 1998; Spivak 1999; Imam,

³ In the study of mobility between Africa and Europe, gender and race play crucial roles in determining who can move, for what purpose, and how. While other categories such as class might not be disregarded, they are less prominent in capturing the dynamics of EU border policies and people’s mobility. Notably, even privileged segments like African elites, that indeed enjoy relatively free mobility, may encounter controls based on racial categorisation (e.g. Ahmed 2007).

Mama and Sow 2004; Sow 2009; Vergès 2017; Fatou Kane 2018; Tamale 2020; Angone 2020).

The strength of an approach that integrates both *decolonial* and *feminist* perspectives in the analysis of border externalisation lies in its capacity to recognise and challenge the intersection of various forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1989), while also providing more robust tools to analyse how individuals continuously engage in acts of insubordination, reappropriation, negotiation, resistance, and survival. By decentring Eurocentric and male-centric analyses, decolonial feminism highlights the importance of bringing forward marginalised, excluded, and silenced knowledges that are fundamental to understanding complex phenomena, including human mobility. This should be understood neither as an attempt to restore a supposedly pure, “original” pre-colonial past (Turner & Mayblin 2021), nor as a reduction of formerly colonised peoples to mere products of colonial histories that deny them agency (Táíwò 2022a), nor as an uncritical glorification of the oppressed as inherently heroic and emancipatory figures. Instead, it should be seen as a process of constantly interrogating systems of power and domination while fostering alternative and plural ways of knowing and living together (Anzaldúa 1987). First, a decolonial feminist approach reveals the multiple layers of entrenched colonial structures, ideologies, and practices that shape border externalisation as a way to manage mobility, offering critical insights into the neo-colonial, racial, and gendered nature of violent bordering processes that, including their development and humanitarian forms, perpetuate rather than mitigate oppressions. Second, it opens pathways to envision alternative, more emancipatory understandings of borders and mobility by learning directly from those who experience and navigate the oppression of border regimes. This entails moving beyond understanding border externalisation solely as domination and a top-down imposition, instead engaging with “counter-histories that can humanise, decolonise and recover the personhood of the oppressed” (Turner & Mayblin 2021:178), while avoiding both victimisation and heroization of mobile subjects.

The Coloniality of the Externalised Border

My understanding of a decolonial feminist approach to mobility and border externalisation is informed by the concept of coloniality (Quijano 2000), which highlights how enduring colonial power structures shape contemporary migration and borders, beyond the historical period of direct colonial rule.

Unlike colonialism, which refers to land dispossession and formal colonial administration, coloniality reveals how unequal power relations persist within the modern world system. Without suggesting simplistic continuities of domination, the coloniality of migration (Gutierrez Rodríguez 2018) situates contemporary migration and border controls within enduring colonial logics of mobility regulation, resource extraction, and North-South dependency (cf. Mayblin & Turner 2020; Lemberg-Pedersen et al. 2022). Scholars describe these dynamics as “neocolonial” (Achiume 2022), employing concepts such as “colonial mobility” (De Genova 2013a) and the “global apartheid of mobility” (van Houtum 2010) to capture how mobility itself, and its control, becomes a site of ongoing dynamics of domination and resistance. Recently, the link between borders, migration and coloniality has also been openly recognised by a small but flourishing literature in the subfield of border externalisation (Cobarrubias and Lemberg-Pedersen 2025; Ould Moctar 2024; Cappiali and Pacciardi 2024; Marino 2023; Jegen 2023; Cobarrubias et al 2023; Korvensyrjä 2017; Lemberg Pedersen 2018). These contributions illuminate how the externalised border regime produces enduring asymmetrical power relations, encompassing both material and non-material forms of domination, constituted by four inseparable axes: coloniality of power, coloniality of knowledge, coloniality of being and coloniality of gender.

The coloniality of power refers to the persistent social, political, and economic patterns of domination between former colonial powers and their colonies (Quijano, 2000). In the context of the regulation of mobility in West Africa, the coloniality of power is reflected in the strategic allocation of aid and financial incentives aimed at deterring migration toward Europe, alongside the sustained and systematic presence of European police forces and private security firms operating within African territories. In Senegal, this dynamic is exemplified, among others, by the presence of EU border forces like Spain’s Guardia Civil and Frontex who patrol Senegalese sea and land borders (Carrera 2007), or Civipol, the French Ministry of the Interior’s technical cooperation agency central to migration control through biometric civil registry reforms (Stambøl and Jegen 2022).

The coloniality of knowledge refers to the colonisation of the mind (wa Thiong’o 1986) through the suppression of indigenous knowledge systems in order to elevate European thought as the sole legitimate form of knowledge. In the context of West African mobility, this dynamic is evident in how externalised border control imposes universalised definitions of migration

(Jegen 2023) and enforces specific socio-spatial orders rooted in Eurocentric understandings of certain territories as extensions of the EU's periphery (Ould Moctar 2024). In Senegal, local languages like Wolof describe movement in neutral terms such as "exit" or "face the sea," while EU and Senegalese state migration policies label the same mobility as "clandestine" or "irregular." This framing casts Europe-bound movement as a threat or aberration, reinforcing a Eurocentric criminalisation of mobility in contexts where movement is otherwise often normalised. In this sense, framing mobility as *migration clandestine* can itself be understood as an expression of the coloniality of knowledge.

The third component of the "colonial matrix of power" (Quijano 2000; Mignolo 2007) is the coloniality of being (Maldonado-Torres 2007), which refers to how colonial legacies continue to deny full humanity to certain groups, rendering them invisible, disposable, and less-than-human (Fanon 2004). Central to this process is race, a social construct that hierarchises people through shifting markers such as skin colour, language, culture, and religion, shaped and institutionalised under colonial rule and naturalised through systems of exploitation that continue to structure the world today (De Genova 2018). In the context of border externalisation in West Africa, the coloniality of being is starkly revealed in the disproportionate exposure of non-white individuals to border violence and death, as externalisation operates as a mechanism of racial ordering that targets and disciplines certain bodies constructed as disposable.

The fourth and final component of the "colonial matrix of power" (Quijano 2000) is the coloniality of gender, a concept introduced by María Lugones (2008) to highlight how colonialism crystallised binary gender divisions as mechanisms of domination, positioning non-white women as the non-human subjects par excellence. In the African context, feminist scholars such as Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (1997), Ifi Amadiume (1987), Amina Mama (1995), Nkiru Nzegwu (2011), and Niara Sudarkasa (1986) have long contested the universalisation of Western gender binaries. Their work shows that gender was not necessarily the primary axis of social organisation in many pre-colonial African societies, but rather became a dominant framework through the influence of Arab-Muslim conquests and the impositions of European colonialism. According to some of these scholars, notably Oyěwùmí (1997), it was only through colonisation that female individuals were redefined as "women" in the Western sense, subordinate, dependent, and passive. This process of "double colonisation" subjected indigenous women to both racial

and gendered dehumanisation (Oyěwùmí 1997), situating them at the lowest rung of the colonial hierarchy of being. While avoiding romanticisation of pre-colonial pasts, such scholarship is crucial to understanding how colonialism entrenched rigid, hierarchical gender roles that continue to structure contemporary relations of power. In the context of mobility in West Africa, the coloniality of gender is evident in the ways mobility is governed by gendered assumptions about who is allowed to move, how, and under what conditions. These assumptions profoundly shape how individuals experience border externalisation along gendered lines. In the Senegalese borderlands, gender is both embedded in local power dynamics and reinforced by external border regimes that amplify inequalities through portrayals of black women as passive and immobile and black men as excessively mobile and threatening (Pacciardi, forthcoming).

Recognising that border externalisation is rooted in colonial histories and shaped by ongoing structures of coloniality, although not rigidly determined by them, allows us to understand that the violence it produces is not incidental, but a deliberate mechanism of control. Black mobility from Africa to Europe disrupts a neocolonial racial order forged through colonial conquest and sustained over time, and is therefore met with lethal force routinely deployed at Europe's externalised borders. At the same time, framing black mobility through the lens of coloniality allows us to see it not merely as an act of survival, but as a rupture within a system built on hierarchies of race and gender. However small they may appear, these acts of insubordination speak back to the colonial order, exposing its cracks and signalling the growing untenability of Eurocentric narratives and practices on borders, migration, and the right to move.

Dismantling the Master's Mobility Regime

Having established the foundational epistemological framework guiding my work, as well as its relevance for border externalisation, I will now explore how this framework specifically influences my theoretical perspective on borders and mobility. By drawing on and contributing to critical border and migration studies, this section introduces two concepts that enable me to trace the continuity and intrinsic relationship between border and mobility: the concept of *colonial encounters* and *black mobility practice*. The former captures how border externalisation meets im/mobility, whereas the latter

identifies the effects of such encounters, focusing on individuals who experience border externalisation firsthand. While these concepts expose the border's inherent violence, their value lies in moving beyond it, toward understanding how individuals respond, strategise, and transcend such violence by resisting, negotiating, and engaging with mobility from the ground up. Developed from field realities where the border's presence is elusive and nuanced, this theoretical framework offers analytical tools for examining similar dynamics elsewhere, particularly where the will to freedom, expressed through movement or other forms of agency, confronts structurally imposed violence.

Colonial Encounters

In an increasingly bordered world, mobility is not only about movement, but it is also, and mostly, about the actual possibilities to move that people experience (Tazzioli 2019). Im/mobility, in this sense, signals that mobility and immobility are always relational, connected and co-dependent such that we should always think of them together (Sheller 2018). Border externalisation policies continually shape the lived possibilities of movement by organising mobility temporally and geographically, filtering it, and subjecting it to scrutiny. At the same time, individuals actively push back against these imposed controls, finding ways to move despite constraints, caught in a continuous tension between the will to move and the impossibility of doing so. It is precisely this tension that I seek to capture through the concept of *colonial encounter*.

The concept of encounter refers to a relational moment shaped by difference, rupture, and surprise (Ahmed 2000), where opposing forces collide in tension or conflict (Wilson 2017), and where friction, fear, uncertainty, and messiness naturally emerge (Tsing 2005). This concept has been employed across geography, anthropology, feminist, and postcolonial scholarship to capture the contact between embodied subjects and the structural forces that shape and mediate these moments of encounter (Ahmed 2000; Tsing 2005; Scheel 2013; Schapendonk et al. 2018; Wilson 2017; Häkli and Kallio 2020; Ould Moctar 2024). Encounters have historically taken place at the margins, spaces where cultures and peoples meet, clash, and grapple with one another, often under conditions of profound power asymmetry (Pratt 1991, as cited in Wilson 2017). While such encounters have frequently been shaped by domination, particularly in colonial contexts, they are not entirely one-sided. Rather, they

involve reciprocal, though uneven, power interactions through which both the conditions and outcomes of the encounter are actively negotiated and transformed (Ahmed 2000). This framing offers a powerful lens for understanding encounters between people on the move and processes of border externalisation, where the conflict emerges from the friction between the drive for mobility and the structural imposition of immobility.

In border and migration studies, the concept of encounter is a relatively recent addition, yet it has already proven analytically fruitful in ways that resonate with decolonial feminist epistemologies. These approaches shift the focus from the dominant structures of border control to the agency of people on the move, illuminating how they navigate, resist, and transform the conditions imposed upon them without subsuming romanticising tendencies. Scheel (2013) theorises the encounter as a site of tension and conflict between migratory movements and efforts to regulate them, marked by moments of excess and unpredictability that reflect a relationship of mutual determination. Similarly, Schapendonk et al. (2018) employ the term encounter to highlight the multiple hindrances faced by people on the move, while emphasizing how these same actors continue to assert their right to mobility. Ould Moctar (2024), while not explicitly defining the term, uses encounter to describe the dynamic interaction between border externalisation policies and the broader historical and social contexts in which such encounters unfold, that simultaneously shape and are shaped by these policies.

Drawing from and contributing to these early theorisations of encounters, therefore, my thesis conceives of the Euro-Senegalese borderlands as a privileged site for the observation of how the need and will to move come into conflict with the imperative of control. In this sense, I conceive of the ways in which black mobility encounters border externalisation as *colonial encounters*, that is, the material and immaterial ways in which individuals' mobility intersect with neocolonial efforts to restrict their movement. Adding to the ways in which the term has been used so far, thus, colonial encounters emphasise the intersection of control and mobility *within* the context of a colonial, Eurocentric and racialised global mobility regime. Framing the encounter between people's mobility and border externalisation as "colonial" allows me to underscore how border externalisation operates as a contemporary manifestation of coloniality (Cobarrubias and Lemberg-Pedersen 2025), not only in its historical lineage, but also in its effects, by dividing the world into compartments (Fanon 2004) that continue to reproduce global hierarchies of movement and control.

Colonial encounters are not interactions between two fixed or static entities, people on the move and border externalisation, but rather dynamic processes in which both are mutually shaped and co-constituted through the encounter itself: borders exist because people move, and the ways people experience im/mobility today are shaped by the presence of these borders. As such, the concept of colonial encounter allows an analysis of how two interacting, yet antagonistic, forces shape each other while each pursues opposite goals. In this sense, the encounter emerges as a “contested terrain of and with disputed stakes within multiple struggles over the selective denial and direct appropriation of mobility and other resources” (Scheel 2013: 285). Here the convergence of the concepts of borders and mobility holds particular significance, allowing me to comprehensively capture both the structural constraints on mobility faced by individuals in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands and people’s persistent will to move. This also makes the concept of colonial encounter particularly suited to capture the tension between structure and agency that arises when border externalisation meets people’s im/mobility.

If colonial encounters are characterised by co-determination, they do not result in total subjugation (e.g., immobilisation) nor in outright resistance (e.g., freedom to move). Instead, they open possibilities for surprise, shock, rupture, and destabilisation, where hierarchies are (temporarily) unsettled, borders are crossed, new ideas are generated, new relationships are formed, hope emerges, and bottom-up articulations of power can arise (Wilson 2017). Moreover, the notion of colonial encounter enables to capture both the micro and macro dimensions of engagements with border externalisation, along with its direct and indirect ramifications. This is important because it allows for conceptualising as colonial encounters a multitude of instances where people’s mobility intersects with the border, whether in specific encounters with structures or individuals directly representing the border (e.g. border guards), or in more diffuse and collective encounters with the broader system and its ramifications (e.g. awareness-raising campaigns). These include interactions with border posts, embassies, and other border infrastructures, as well as more mundane and indirect encounters which result from the conditions for mobility shaped by border regimes, such as encounters with smugglers, aggressors, or various forms of exploitation and suffering to which people are exposed to as a result of violent border policies.

In addition, the concept of colonial encounter enables me to trace how the interaction between EU border externalisation policies and people’s will to

move is mediated by pre-existing socio-cultural and historical dynamics and ideologies that underpin both European border externalisation policies and the individual and collective experiences of people on the move, for example, colonial histories of mobility, socio-cultural factors, gender norms etc. This means that colonial encounters do not occur in a vacuum, but are both shaped by and shape broader dynamics external to the encounter itself. Besides, through the notion of colonial encounters I am able to trace the struggle for mobility across less visible geographies and situations where conflictual and often hidden negotiations unfold between people subjected to border structures and the border structure itself. Crucially, these encounters are not confined to formal border sites or to actors readily identified as “migrants.” They may also be experienced by families and communities, or unfold in less visible and material ways, within the realm of imagination and in everyday mundane interactions.

All in all, the concept of colonial encounter serves as a lens through which to examine the tension between structural constraints on mobility (border externalisation) and the agency of individuals who navigate, confront, and resist these constraints. While colonial encounters are inherently violent, my contribution moves beyond a sole focus on the violence of the border itself by examining how individuals respond to, navigate, and at times transcend this violence, resisting, negotiating, feeling, and engaging with mobility from the ground up. This analytical shift is pursued through the concept of black mobility practice, to which I now turn.

From Colonial Encounters to Mobility Practice

From the vantage point of the mobility paradigm outlined in the introduction, and drawing on both the mobility turn in the social sciences (Sheller & Urry 2006; Cresswell 2010; Adey et al. 2013) and critical border scholarship centred on people on the move (Mezzadra 2010; De Genova 2013; Scheel 2013; Tazzioli 2019), the colonial encounter between border externalisation and the subjective will to move generates a distinct form of mobility, which I conceptualise as black mobility practice⁴. Black mobility practice, shaped by the afterlives of colonial encounters, refers to the framework through which individuals constrained by border externalisation assert, navigate, and realise

⁴ From now on, the term “mobility practice” will implicitly mean black mobility practice as a specific form of racialised and controlled mobility, and not all kinds of mobilities.

the will to move, while also responding to and negotiating the ways in which border regimes permeate and shape their everyday lives. This concept allows for understanding colonial encounters from the point of view of those most affected by it without disregarding the continuous interplay between structure and agency. Agency, in this sense, should be intended as potential for and the capacity to act within and against socially imposed constraints, here represented by border externalisation and its diffused effects.

Drawing on social practice theory (c.f. Bourdieu 1977; 1990) and, in particular, the work of Sally Haslanger (2019) I define practice as “a site of socially organised agency, a nexus where individual agency is enabled and constrained by social factors” (2019: 2). While social practices impose normative pressures and shape expectations for individual action, they are not fixed; they allow space for individual and collective agency and serve as potential sites for social and political transformation. Individuals, especially when acting together or from marginalised standpoints, can resist or reinterpret the norms that govern practices. Addressing black mobility through Haslanger’s conceptualisation of social practice allows to shed light on the fundamental role played by people’s agency in (re)shaping black mobility beyond the limits imposed by structural factors. While black mobility practice is marked by restrictions, limiting access to safe and regular mobility, and exposing individuals to violence and exploitation, it also opens up spaces for agency. Black mobility practice, therefore, is not only shaped by unequal power relations but also productive of new power dynamics, including emergent forms of collectivity, solidarity, socio-economic organisation, and everyday resistance. At the same time, black mobility practice is not just about the physical act of moving from one place to another. Instead, it provides a way to understand how people’s lives are influenced and shaped by border externalisation, not only through their actual movements but also through their emotions, thoughts, and social relations. This applies both to people who physically move and those who stay behind or are immobilised. In other words, black mobility practice provides the framework through and against which agency, in its multiple, often contradictory forms, emerges.

Against this backdrop, embracing the concept of black mobility practice broadens the analytical lens on border externalisation in two key ways. First, it challenges dominant narratives that portray people on the move either solely as vulnerable victims of deprivation, poverty, and suffering, or conversely, as heroic figures resisting oppressive border regimes. As Lindberg (2024:7) observes, representing “others in pain,” even with the intent to highlight

violence and amplify marginalised voices, can paradoxically silence those very voices. Similarly, the heroization of mobility risks imposing a voice on people that may not reflect their lived realities, thereby obscuring the complexity and diversity of their experiences. The concept of black mobility practice seeks to highlight nuances and contradictions, capturing the spectrum of individual and collective agency characteristic of most colonial encounters. This includes forms of agency that do not always involve overt confrontation but also encompass tacit negotiations, invisible struggles, adaptation, and strategic manoeuvring. Such a framing enables a more complex understanding of mobility shaped by colonial legacies, revealing resilience, hope, solidarity, and everyday forms of resistance beyond reductive narratives of suffering or heroism. Second, to fully grasp what is at stake under border externalisation, we must move beyond viewing mobility solely as bodily displacement and avoid pre-determining which subjects “matter” in border and migration studies. Here, mobility practice enables a richer engagement with lived experiences, encompassing both those visibly confronting borders through movement and those who do not move physically but experience mobility vicariously through family, community, or political struggle. This approach situates im/mobility within a broader social context, showing how one person’s mobility or immobility affects others beyond the physical border itself. Based on my fieldwork, I have identified three interrelated components of mobility practice: imagined, embodied, and political.

Mobility practice as imagined

Human mobility cannot be fully grasped without acknowledging how it is shaped by and, in turn, shapes processes of imagination (Salazar 2020). The capacity and potential for mobility reside in the acts of dreaming, planning, and fearing movement, in imagining where, when, and how to move, in envisioning journeys, and destinations, and in aspiring to new lives and future selves (Cangia and Zittoun 2020). At the same time, this imagination is continuously shaped, constrained, or transformed by the lived realities of im/mobility over time. Mobility practice as imagined aims to capture how imagination and imaginaries are crucial to understand the encounter between border externalisation and people’s mobility. Imagination is the subjective cognitive ability to imagine and envision present and future possibilities which “forms an essential part of the continuous process of crafting selfhood and concrete strategies for future mobility” (D’Onofrio & Sjöberg, 2020:745). Imaginaries, in turn, are “culturally shared and socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with the personal imagination and

are used as meaning-making devices, mediating how people act, cognize and value the world” (Salazar 2020:770). Mobility as an imagined practice emerges at the intersection of imagination and imaginaries, and is continually negotiated and reshaped through encounters with borders, forced returns, narratives of actual mobility, and shifting socio-cultural gender norms.

Imagining is a core element of black mobility practice in, at least, three senses. First, border externalisation policies impose specific limitations on movement, which in turn construct and delimit how individuals imagine their mobility and trajectories. Second, socio-cultural imaginaries and gendered norms deeply rooted in the context of Senegalese communities, which circulate through families, personal networks, media, and shared stories, play a significant role in defining who is expected to move, the underlying motivations for such movement and the ideas associated with moving to Europe. Third, these structural and socio-cultural constraints are mediated by the individual’s imaginative capacity. Through their desires and aspirations, individuals respond to dominant imaginaries, actively reshaping them by envisioning alternative motivations and possibilities for moving.

Connecting imagination and imaginaries to mobility helps disrupt dominant narratives that reduce black mobility to mere responses to poverty, hunger, or conflict. This perspective aligns with feminist critiques of linear migration models, which frame mobility primarily as the outcome of migration drivers understood as structural factors such as war or economic grievances (Pettinen and Kynsilehto 2017). Such models often assume a deterministic and causal relationship between one or more structural conditions and migration, overlooking the complex, agentive, and imaginative dimensions of mobility. These assumptions continue to underpin many border externalisation policies, particularly the “root causes” approach, which rests on the belief that development aid can extinguish the desire to move. Mobility, understood as an imagined practice, highlights instead the desire to explore, to move beyond the familiar, and to experience life differently, positioning individuals as capable of imagining, desiring, and dreaming beyond the constraints of necessity (Ahmad 2009). This act of imagining also constitutes a form of agency, a means through which people make sense of their world and act upon it, regardless of whether physical movement takes place (Womersley 2020). Far from being a passive fantasy, imagining actively shapes decisions to move or stay and influences how individuals navigate and respond to broader structures of power. Dreams, wishes, and imagined futures thus become terrains where

both individual and collective agency play a crucial role in (re)shaping black mobility beyond the limits imposed by border externalisation.

Mobility practice as imagined first allows me to capture how the imagination of mobility matters in all phases of mobility, when people are not (yet) moving, while people move and once they are forcibly returned. Mobility practice is imagined when individuals, though physically bound to one place, envision their lives unfolding elsewhere. The border materialises in the lives of people in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands the moment they begin to imagine mobility. Unlike more visibly securitised borderlands, the border in Senegal remains invisible until movement is envisioned. At that point, it becomes an inescapable reality, as individuals confront a web of structural barriers, beginning with the near-impossibility of securing a visa and the many hurdles to even applying for one. Second, conceiving mobility practice as imagined allows me to highlight how imaginaries of life in Europe, together with notions of self-realisation and success (*tekki*), critically shape individuals' decisions to pursue mobility. This also opens space to consider how gender shapes these imaginaries, as men and women often imagine mobility differently. Third, mobility practice as imagined allows me to trace how knowledge about mobility is socially constructed and circulated through families, communities, and peer networks in Senegal. Mobility is often seen as a normal, even expected, part of life, deeply embedded in collective histories and shaped by shared imaginaries about how movement can still be achieved despite border restrictions. This perspective challenges both the idea that mobility from Senegal is a recent crisis and the portrayal of migrants as uninformed masses blindly embarking on perilous journeys, a narrative often pushed by awareness-raising campaigns and that stands at the basis of humanitarian justifications of border externalisation "to save lives". Instead, it reveals that mobility decisions are relational and informed (even if imperfectly), and shaped by imagined strategies to navigate restrictions and reduce risk.

Mobility practice as embodied

Bodies, embodied experiences, and emotions are central to feminist and decolonial analyses of the world, offering forms of knowledge that are often dismissed or overlooked (Anzaldúa 1987; Crenshaw 1989; Collins 1990; hooks 1992). In the context of borders and im/mobility, scholars emphasise the importance of approaching the body as both subject and object of analysis in order to understand how power operates spatially to regulate, confine, produce, and racialise mobile subjects (Hyndman 2004; Mountz 2018). This is

particularly relevant in the case of border externalisation policies whose effects are embodied by those who become mobile and attempt to actually cross a border, but also by those that do not move, yet live in places considered Europe's borderlands, such as Senegal. In this sense, the body can be considered as a crucial unit of analysis to both highlight the ways in which certain people are categorised and filtered even before they cross any border, as well as to understand the effects of these external bordering processes on the people (Gilmartin and Kuusisto-Arponen 2019). As such, focusing on the scale of the body as a site of power struggles allows to connect "the individual, the intimate and the local to the structural, the political and the global" (Sharaoui 2020: 908).

Focusing on the body from decolonial feminist perspectives means moving beyond approaches that reduce the body on the move solely to a site of vulnerability exposed to systems of control. Instead, it invites an exploration of the multiple ways in which the body plays a central role in the mobility process, not just in terms of subjugation, but taking an active role in different phases of the mobility process, focusing on what the body *does* within the encounter with the border. On one hand, inhabiting a certain body can limit mobility, as black individuals are often marked as "migrants" and subjected to control, with borders inscribed on their bodies wherever they are. On the other hand, the body can also be a site of agency, where vulnerability is strategically used to navigate borders, resist control, or claim rights. Mobility as an embodied practice captures how the body is both shaped by border domination and reclaimed as a tool of resistance, functioning as both a site of constraint and a source of possibility in encounters with border regimes.

Embodiment is central to black mobility practice in two ways: through the physical and emotional toll of border externalisation, and through endurance, as individuals carry these burdens while continuing to move, survive, and resist. By embodiment I refer to a scale of analysis that zooms in to "how the biological body is interpellated into and produced through relations and hierarchies of power (for example, gender, race, class and sexuality)" (Rygiel 2010:147). Embodiment encompasses both the materiality of the body and its entanglement with the social and cultural practices of emotion, which can be experienced individually or collectively (Anctil Avoine 2022). In the context of mobility, embodiment operates on two interrelated levels: as physical sensation and as emotional experience. On a physical level, the individuals I encountered in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands, whether they move or not, experience the effects of border externalisation in profoundly material ways.

Migrants feel mobility in their bodies: seasickness on boats, the cold of night sea crossings, the exhaustion of desert travel, the physical trauma of torture in Libyan detention, or injuries sustained at border fences. The body bears the pain of shackles during deportation flights and bruises from pushbacks at sea. These are not metaphorical effects, mobility is etched into the body through pain, fatigue, and injury. Even those who do not move, such as mothers who lose children en route, experience this embodiment through physical suffering as a result of their loss, felt in the chest, carried in the stomach, expressed through insomnia or bodily tension. On an emotional and affective level, mobility is equally embodied. Emotions such as hope, joy, and excitement for the journey, coexist with fear, anxiety, despair, frustration, anger, and disillusionment. These feelings are not merely personal; they are socially situated and collectively shared. For people on the move, repeated failures, near-death experiences, or forced returns can generate deep emotional wounds, feelings of shame, alienation, or hopelessness. But emotions also circulate among those who do not cross borders. Families waiting at home live with prolonged uncertainty, loss, and anticipation, and may internalise collective guilt or blame, as in the case of mothers.

Yet embodiment is not only passive or imposed. The body can also be reclaimed as a site of action and strategy. People actively use their bodies to resist or navigate border regimes, hiding to evade detection, altering their appearance to pass unnoticed, or using signs of vulnerability, such as fatigue or gendered expectations, to access aid. This strategic use of the body is visible in both people on the move and those who do not, like the mothers of the disappeared, whose public mourning can transform grief into a personal and collective gain. Understanding mobility as an embodied practice therefore means attending to how both the physical and emotional dimensions of the body are shaped by border regimes, while also recognising how bodies actively resist, endure, and reinterpret these conditions. Embodiment reveals not only the vulnerability imposed by borders but also the quiet and strategic forms of resilience that emerge through and from the body. By examining mobility practice as embodied, I also zoom into how the encounter with the border is experienced differently by women and men, with gender playing a crucial role in shaping how bodies socialised as female and male move, what they experience during mobility, how they mobilise their bodies differently to make political claims and when forcibly returned. It also reveals how the encounter with border externalisation interacts with pre-existing gender norms and socio-cultural dynamics, sometimes constraining, but at other times enabling agency. As such, mobility practice as embodied also challenges disembodied accounts

of mobility, where the mobile body is often implicitly masculine, highlighting how the daily dynamics and struggles inherent in mobility are indeed gendered (Mountz 2004).

Mobility practice as political

As a political practice, mobility seeks to encompass individual or collective actions where mobility itself, or the assertion of its necessity, takes on a political dimension. This involves engaging in actions, discourses, and performances in response to imposed borders, investing mobility with political weight. Mobility, in this sense, becomes a resource to be claimed or an experience through which spaces of (re)existence are forged. Mobility practice as political, ranges from overt activism, such as grassroots no-border movements and solidarity networks, to more everyday acts of defeating imposed borders or facilitating border crossing, or forming support collectives. All these different forms of mobility practice are political because they emerge from a shared condition of exclusion and respond to it with common strategies and claims that challenge the border regime. I employ two distinct definitions of the term “political” that are a core element of black mobility practice. The first is a narrower interpretation, focusing on the political strategies and mechanisms enacted against processes of border externalisation through political mobilisations such as forms of protests against the border regime. The second definition is broader, encompassing the ability of individuals to respond to and navigate the constraints imposed upon them in ways that are politically significant, through more or less overt acts of insubordination and more subtle forms of mobilisation that might not be publicly visible but challenge or negotiate oppressive power structures created by the border.

Conceiving mobility practice as political is important as often people on the move are portrayed as chaotic masses deprived of agency, and their actions are considered non-political or even criminal (Tazzioli 2019). Instead, through mobility as a political practice we can also capture forms of agency often dismissed as apolitical. The use of the word “political”, hence, is used in contrast with the depoliticisation and criminalisation of black mobility that is enacted when people on the move are portrayed as threats needing control or victims needing protection, obscuring the power struggle inherent in their quest for freedom through mobility. Politics here extends beyond the exclusive struggle for power. It also encompasses the struggle to be heard and to reclaim a space of existence when restrictive mobility regimes strip away everything, from desires and aspirations, to one’s life and the lives of those one loves.

Mobility as a political practice therefore captures several agencies that work against, within and through restrictive mobility regimes: it captures visible and open struggles against the imposed mobility regime (e.g. activist campaigns against borders in Senegal), initiatives that aim to create sustainable alternatives to mobility by tweaking EU border policies to one's own benefit (e.g. steering EU funding for border externalisation towards personal benefit), the creation of spaces of solidarity and mutual support as a result of shared suffering (e.g. collectives of women who lost their loved ones), the everyday tactical actions of people on the move who reclaim mobility (e.g. facilitating people's movement across borders, practising solidarity with other people on the move, implementing strategies to overcome imposed controls etc.)

As political, mobility practice also encompasses a broad range of actions that may not be immediately recognised as such and cannot be reduced to "resistance" (e.g., King 2016), often framed as conscious opposition to the border regime. Instead, it offers a more nuanced reading of the diverse ways people encounter and endure border externalisation, highlighting not only disobedience but also the quiet, often invisible acts through which people carve out space to "simply" live and move within a neocolonial mobility regime. Rather than always taking the form of overt opposition, mobility as a political practice captures how individuals and families, often operating within, not against, restrictive regimes, strategically endure and sometimes repurpose border violence in ways that fall outside dominant notions of resistance, yet still constitute meaningful everyday political action shaped by exhaustion and negotiation. This recognition underscores that individuals navigating border externalisation may be unable or unwilling to fully detach from its oppressive structures, yet still exercise a form of political mobility, one shaped by, and enacted within, the co-dependencies of the neocolonial border regime. This understanding of the "political" in mobility practice aligns closely with feminist and decolonial perspectives by capturing forms of agency that are often invisible, private, or hidden. Framing mobility practice as political also challenges the dominant image of the "resistant migrant," typically a young, able-bodied male confronting borders through overt defiance or activism, by recognizing diverse, gendered expressions of political agency. Drawing on Mahmood (2005), it moves beyond the binary of resistance and subordination to include both acts that challenge imposed norms and the everyday ways individuals inhabit and navigate them. This broader conception better captures gendered dynamics where political agency emerges not only in public, visible acts but also in quiet, everyday practices.

Chapter III: Methodology

A decolonial feminist approach to borders and mobility presents not only an epistemological challenge but also necessitates a rethinking of methodological choices and research practices. Rather than offering prescriptive guidelines on methods, ethics, or reflexivity in researching borders and mobility, this chapter illustrates how navigating the discomfort of engaging with violent contexts shaped the research process and knowledge production. The opening section outlines the foundations of the ethnographic approach adopted here, rooted in feminist, decolonial, and critical ethnographic traditions. It is guided by three interwoven pillars: critical reflexivity, a people-centered ethos, and a commitment to transformative militant research. The subsequent section addresses questions of field access, participant engagement, ethical positioning, and specific methodological choices. Finally, the chapter explores how narrative becomes a key analytical lens through which colonial encounters and black mobility practice are accessed and interpreted, detailing the data analysis process that informs the engagement with participants' stories.

Ethnography from Decolonial and Feminist

Perspectives

Feminist research has long challenged the illusion of objective and universal knowledge, emphasising instead that all research is situated, shaped by particular standpoints, and guided by political and epistemological commitments (Ackerly and True 2019; Hesse-Biber 2012; Harcourt et al. 2023). Eschewing the criticism of lacking objectivity or scientific rigour, feminists contend that acknowledging the situated nature of research actually enhances the overall objectivity of the research process (c.f. Harding 1982, strong objectivity). This is achieved by consistently and openly reflecting on the researcher's biases, recognising the profound impact of the researcher's

own position in the world and in relation to the people she collaborates with on shaping the research itself. Hence, a central aspect of feminist research is the rejection of erasing oneself from the research, not as a performative or egocentric act, but as an ethical choice that considers knowledge as shared, relational, and co-constructed, rather than characterised by individual ownership or expertise (Boer Cueva et al. 2024). Furthermore, feminist research does not aim only at *describing* the world, but it also aims at *changing* it, generating knowledge that is aligned with social justice and social transformation, although these cannot be reduced to a single political or normative agenda (Ackerly and True 2019).

While feminist research has drawn attention to the power dynamics inherent in the research process, indigenous and decolonial scholarship has gone further by exposing how research itself has often been complicit in systems of oppression (Tilley 2011, Smith 2012, Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019). This is not only because, as feminists have long emphasised, knowledge is never neutral, but also due to the deep entanglement of academic inquiry with imperial and colonial structures (Smith 2012, Thambinathan & Kinsella 2021, Ba 2022). This is particularly evident in the African context, where colonial-era field research and human sciences were deeply entwined with colonial administrations, producing knowledge that legitimised colonial rule and directly served its strategic and governance needs (Tilley 2011; Nhemachane, Mlambo and Kaundjua 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2019; Ba, 2022). In Senegal, for example, French colonial administrators established the *Institut Français d'Afrique Noire* (IFAN) in 1938, still active today, where research was structured around extractive and exploitative practices, relying on the unpaid labour of Africans to generate knowledge that served the interests of colonial administration. Against this background, scholars have criticised how the notion of Africa as a field, shaped by colonial histories of research, legitimises violence and exploitation, portraying the continent as a site for experiments ranging from colonial projects that caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands to ongoing international practices using Africa as a testing ground for weapons, drugs, and socio-political interventions (Nhemachane, Mlambo and Kaundjua 2016; Ndlovu-Gastheni 2018).

Despite efforts to critically reflect on and transform research practices, fieldwork in Africa, especially in migration and mobility studies, can still inadvertently reproduce colonial logics (Ba 2022). Without critical reflection, it can function as a form of epistemic and material violence that advances state interests in disciplining and controlling certain populations (Collins 2022),

thereby continuing to produce knowledge aligned with exclusionary agendas aimed at regulating, filtering, and restricting black mobility (Stierl 2022; Lindberg 2024; Amelung, Scheel & van Reekum 2024). This can occur not only when research is explicitly designed as a migration management tool, reflecting an ongoing tendency in many university programs and research funding schemes (Landau & Palmay 2016; Chimni 2009; Geiger and Pécoud 2010; Pezzani and Heller 2013), but also when marginalised voices are either excluded from academic knowledge production or included in a tokenistic manner, speaking “about” or “for” those targeted by border policies rather than engaging “with” them.

Inspired by these reflections, I anchor my critical ethnographic approach in feminist and decolonial methodologies (Mendia Azkue et al. 2014; Manning 2022; Smith 2021; Boer Cueva et al. 2024), reconfiguring ethnographic practice through a decolonial feminist epistemological lens. This approach aligns with critical ethnography’s focus on engaging marginalised perspectives (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) and fostering dialogue between researchers and participants (Foley 2002), while also resonating with decolonial and feminist epistemologies that emphasise continuous self-reflection to challenge biases and confront the power structures shaping research from a position of complicity (Applebaum 2010). By foregrounding such power dynamics and situating research within broader socio-political contexts, this approach enables a critical reckoning with the violence embedded in knowledge production, insisting on accountability to the communities it engages and striving toward a more emancipatory understanding of borders and mobility. As such, decolonial feminist ethnography should not be viewed as a means of absolving researchers from responsibility, nor as a “get out of jail free card” (Hagen et al. 2023: 25) or a “reification of material, assumed, and imagined hierarchies” (Gani and Khan 2024). Instead, it compels researchers to confront their own biases and sit with discomfort, acknowledging that “thinking is clustered with stereotypes and preheld assumptions that can inhibit our pursuit of knowledge” (Gani & Khan 2024), while urging them to let this awareness shape their research practices. Approaching ethnography through a decolonial feminist lens, therefore, is not a fixed method or a checklist, but an ongoing, relational process of learning, unlearning, and critical self-reflection that continuously interrogates entrenched hierarchies of power (Russo 2018).

Still, no matter how reflexive, situated, or politically committed, academic research cannot undo the material violence of the border regime, nor bridge the structural distance between the researcher, most of the readers of this thesis,

and the people whose lives shape its core. This is a central tension that cannot be resolved but must be made visible. The ethnographic narrative presented throughout the thesis is thus not offered as an insider account or an objective rendering of the “reality” of borders and mobility in Senegal. Rather, the ethnographic narrative emerges from the interplay between empirical details and the theoretical implications of colonial encounters and mobility practice, shaped by my own situated perspective and the active involvement of the people I engaged with in the encounter. In the next subsection, I outline some of the fundamental pillars that have shaped my learning journey: critical reflexivity, a people-centred approach, and transformative and militant research.

Critical reflexivity

As a feminist practice, reflexivity involves a sustained engagement with how power relations embedded in the research process shape fieldwork encounters and knowledge production (Nagar & Geiger 2007). According to Young (2006:119), structural injustices are not the result of isolated actions, but of systemic processes in which individuals are socially connected; thus, those who contribute to these systems, knowingly or not, bear responsibility for their outcomes. Research is no exception. When fieldwork is approached through a decolonial feminist lens, it demands an active reckoning with how power structures rooted in coloniality shape not only the research context but also the relationship between the researcher and the people she engages with within the whole process of knowledge production. From a decolonial feminist perspective, then, reflexivity is not a matter of personal introspection alone, but a political practice of accountability within broader histories and structures of domination.

I locate myself as an EU-funded researcher who grew up in southern Europe and now conducts doctoral research in Sweden on African-European mobility. This positioning is not neutral; it is embedded in colonial continuities and Eurocentric epistemologies that continue to shape global knowledge hierarchies and the governance of mobility. My research takes place within academic institutions and funding structures that are deeply embedded in broader political contexts, including those shaped by European border governance. As such, research on migration and borders is often conducted within environments that are themselves shaped by the very dynamics under critique here, where institutional priorities and funding streams may align, intentionally or not, with security-oriented agendas (Martins 2023), and more

broadly remain inextricably tied to the extractivism that characterises the migration industry (Andersson, 2014; Gazzotti, 2021). Acknowledging complicity in this system, and trying to mitigate existing power imbalances, particularly when my research is rendered possible within the privileges afforded by dominant structures, is a necessary condition for fostering ethical, political alliances with those whose movement is systematically constrained or criminalised (Ahmed 2007).

In the context of my fieldwork, power within the encounter between myself and research participants was unevenly distributed along lines of whiteness, gender, and nationality, shaped by the privileges and exclusions these categories entail. In Senegal, whiteness functions not simply as a racial category but as a dense signifier of Europeaness, class privilege, and historical power. Its symbolic and material force is captured in the word *toubab*, originally used during the colonial era to describe European doctors and administrators in West Africa, and now applied more broadly to white foreigners such as myself. As a historically rooted and socially charged label, *toubab* encapsulates racialised hierarchies and colonial memory, while also reflecting contemporary global inequalities. Whiteness in this context operates as a mobile marker of authority, privilege and presumed expertise. It often confers assumed knowledge, access to wealth, and the power to move freely across borders, privileges denied to most of the Senegalese people I encountered. While broader power structures upholding whiteness remained largely intact during my fieldwork, shaping not only the terms of engagement but also the limits of what can be shared and understood, everyday moments like cooking together, walking to the market, or chatting after a meal, occasionally created spaces of connection and mutual recognition that momentarily transcended these asymmetries, fostering trust, intimacy, and glimpses of solidarity across difference. At the same time, *toubabness* (coupled with gender), both reinforced power imbalances and offered pathways for connection. While my whiteness often drew unwanted attention, resulting in stares and unsolicited interactions, it also facilitated engagement, as it sparked curiosity and openness in many people. My age, similar to that of many I engaged with, along with my Italian nationality, helped bridge cultural gaps and foster connections, thanks to shared references to global popular culture such as films and music, as well as Italy's historical ties to the Senegalese diaspora.

Besides, gender has both limited and favoured interactions. As a female researcher navigating predominantly male-dominated spaces, my interactions

were often shaped by unsolicited attentions, ranging from flirtatious remarks to unwanted advances, alongside societal expectations to perform traditional female roles such as cooking and serving food, speaking less or avoiding certain topics, and showing modesty by not challenging masculine authority. These gendered dynamics required constant negotiation of personal boundaries, respect and access, as I had to carefully balance conforming to gender norms while remaining comfortable with myself. At the same time, being a woman granted me entry into spaces that were otherwise difficult to access and opened avenues for conversations on sensitive issues like gender violence and expectations. Engaging with women, in particular, was easier due to shared gendered experiences, allowing me access to private, domestic spaces such as kitchens or bedrooms, where trust and conversation could flourish more easily. However, this access was also fraught with complexities, as interactions with women often required passage through men as gatekeepers, followed by ongoing negotiation of male presence during interviews.

Finally, the linguistic aspect of fieldwork, as a proxy for nationality, significantly shaped interactions, as language can function as a structure of domination, either reinforcing or easing power dynamics. This is particularly important in Senegal, where French, as the language of colonial domination, carries significant weight in a post-colonial society. My lack of proficiency and strong non-French accent, far from being a barrier, became a tool for connection. Struggling with the colonial language helped level the playing field, making me appear less foreign and intimidating. At the same time, my efforts to learn some Wolof and a few greetings in Pular, two of the languages most commonly spoken by the people I engaged with, though limited, were appreciated as a sign of respect and a genuine effort to connect with the local community.

People-centred approach

Bringing lived experiences at the centre of the research means prioritising knowledge and perspectives of those people in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands who have direct personal experiences of im/mobility as a result of border policies. Indeed, a decolonial feminist ethnography recognises that those that have been directly affected by border policies have unique insights and understandings that cannot be gained otherwise. Although this does not preclude scholars who do not have lived experiences of im/mobility to investigate and understand the realities that affect others, people who have

lived them have an “epistemic privilege that is important to consider in the production of knowledge as the marginalised go from being object to being subject of knowledge creation” (Curiel 2022: 52). This entails that the process of knowledge production centring the lived experiences of communities in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands must be grounded in collaboration and emphasise reciprocity, learning from people in the field and conducting research “with” rather than “on” them. Although the research process is inevitably embedded in unequal power relations, where the researcher retains control over the narrative, analytical frameworks, and outcomes, a people-centred approach that focuses on lived experiences can help mitigate some of these imbalances.

First, such an approach values and allows to flow naturally those mundane interactions between the researcher and participants that characterise ethnographic research. In practice, this meant making an effort, whenever possible, to engage with research participants outside the interview setting, participating in daily activities, both work-related, such as cleaning fish, mending fishing nets, and cooking, as well as leisure activities like eating together or drinking tea. These moments provided valuable opportunities to exchange ideas beyond the research topic, while ensuring respect for participants’ time, especially when they hosted me during work or other busy moments. My gender often influenced how these mundane exchanges unfolded. For instance, I was more easily invited to join women in domestic and caregiving tasks, while I was generally excluded from activities perceived as more masculine, such as playing football or joining the village elders for afternoon chats.

As in any relationship based on reciprocity, a people-centred approach also involves the researcher being mindful not to be the sole questioner, but instead remaining open to being asked questions, and encouraging participants to do so. This mutual exchange, in which the researcher shares aspects of their own life, redistributes power by shifting the dynamic from researcher-to-subject toward a more people-to-people relationship (Anderson 1991), making the interaction more horizontal and reciprocal. For example, I never shied away from engaging in “difficult” conversations, whether about what I could realistically do for the people I engaged with, which routes I believed were safest to reach Europe, the kinds of jobs available to those living in irregularity, or which European countries might offer better conditions. While I was always clear that I could not provide visas or jobs, I remained open to these conversations, recognising that knowledge exchange had to go both ways: just

as I sought to learn from them, they too had a right to seek my perspective. While encouraging a conversational mode, a people-centred approach requires the researcher to adopt a relatively “passive” role in the interaction, allowing participants to shape the research in ways that reflect their own priorities and perspectives. This approach involves not only listening to people’s stories but also letting them influence the research trajectory. For instance, participants suggested topics they deemed important to explore or directed me to areas outside of Dakar that I had not initially planned to visit, revealing perspectives and experiences that would have otherwise remained inaccessible.

Second, embracing a people-centred approach moves beyond viewing the researcher as the sole “expert” and individuals as mere “informants” valued only for their firsthand accounts of lived experiences of im/mobility. Such a limited view risks commodifying and devaluing participants’ knowledge, reducing it to testimony rather than recognising it as expert knowledge capable of informing research and policy (Lindberg 2024). This dichotomy can be overcome, among other strategies, by fostering a two-way flow of knowledge that allows people not only to share their personal stories about im/mobility but also to express their broader thoughts and perspectives on migration. This approach respects their agency and intellectual input, addressing a common participant concern that research often reduces them to sources of lived experiences rather than valued contributors to policy discussions or broader migration debates.

Finally, centring research around people-to-people relationships rather than researcher-researched dynamics inevitably presents challenges, missteps, emotional struggles, and failures, as it requires a constant process of redefining boundaries, much like any human relationship. Building trust involves not only creating space for others to share their stories but also making oneself vulnerable and emotionally attuned. The awareness of my embodiment of whiteness, and the privilege it entails as opposed to most people I interviewed, often led to feelings of discomfort and a constant reflection on my actions, words, and thoughts as I worked to mitigate power imbalances and tried to ‘give back’ whenever I could. At times, there was tension between striving for people-to-people connection and feeling instrumentalised, such as when my presence as a white researcher was leveraged for social capital or money. In some instances, I allowed people to reappropriate my whiteness through this instrumentalisation to shift power dynamics and rebalance relations, for example when I let people “show me off” to neighbours as a family friend. In other cases, however, I felt vulnerable and uncomfortable with this dynamic.

This ongoing negotiation of boundaries was not without its challenges, as maintaining an ideal of equitable collaboration was not always easy or possible. The goal of a people-to-people approach, in this sense, lies not in a fixed point of arrival but in the process itself, an ongoing effort to engage as equals, acknowledging that both the researcher and participants are constantly learning and evolving, valuing vulnerability and embracing the possibility of failure.

Transformative and militant research

One of the key challenges of a decolonial feminist ethnography lies in bridging theory and practice: contributing not only to academic knowledge but also to social transformation. While power structures that shape research and encounters in the field cannot be escaped, acknowledging these dynamics can push researchers to explore how difference can become a site of possibility and a condition for negotiating and creating spaces of solidarity and action (Anctil Avoine 2022). As Ahmed (2014:189) reminds us, solidarity does not erase difference but “involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we don’t have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground”.

In this sense, inspired by solidarities in critical border studies scholars and social movements, particularly as articulated in a 2013 Special Issue published in *Postcolonial Studies* (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013), I have embraced militant research as “the place where academia and activism meet in the search for new ways of acting that lead to new ways of thinking” (Bookchin et al. 2013:4). In outlining a post-colonial approach to migration, border and mobility, De Genova (2013a: 250) argues that researchers and scholars of migration represent “the connection” between people on the move and the broader political and legal regimes that seek to control their mobility. From this standpoint, research on border and mobility cannot happen from a neutral ground. Given the socio-political struggles that inherently shape this field, the researcher inevitably finds herself as part of this conflict, and she is therefore called to be a party in the dispute, one way or the other (De Genova 2013). This is the essence of militant and transformative research: militant because it actively participates in the struggle for a more just mobility system, refusing to remain neutral; transformative because, by being part of the struggle, it aims to change how we understand black mobility and how borders are governed.

While aware that the term “activist” is often preferred in the English-speaking tradition, where the term “militant” is frequently negatively connotated and associated with violent extremism, this association does not necessarily hold in Latin-language traditions, which have shaped both my upbringing and my fieldwork. As such I follow Garelli and Tazzioli (2013) in deliberately standing by the term militant. First, with its partisan and organisational connotations, “militant” more aptly conveys a political understanding of knowledge as a political epistemology: both a practice embedded in the politics of production and circulation, and a discursive form of political action (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013:246). In this sense, the term militant resists the depoliticisation of migration that often accompanies its absorption into academic knowledge production. Second, militant research draws continuity with the Italian Workerist tradition of the 1960s, a Marxist-influenced social and political movement where researchers collaborated with factory workers to analyse shifts in the production system and develop new strategies for class struggle (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013). For these researchers, knowledge production was a political goal: to create tools for social and political transformation. This understanding of militancy also resonates with my own trajectory, both intellectually and politically shaped by this tradition, as my interest in borders and mobility emerged through my undergraduate and graduate studies in Italy, as well engagements with political activism. Moreover, militant research aligns with other traditions marked by similar commitments that have shaped my research trajectory, in particular I draw on the tradition of *investigación militante* in Latin America (e.g., Anctil Avoine 2024), particularly relevant due to the epistemological roots of decolonial thought in the region, and the understanding of the term *militant* in research on migration and mobility in the Francophone world (Makaremi 2008), which resonates deeply with my fieldwork as I bonded with many interlocutors through our shared identification as *militants*.

During my time in Senegal, my commitment to dismantle an oppressive border regime and fight for universal access to free and safe mobility was not secondary to my research. My political agenda was never hidden but embraced fully in my engagement with the people in the field. This was made possible through my engagement with local activist groups, collectives, and individuals advocating for freedom of movement, a commitment that shaped both the duration of my fieldwork and my continued involvement afterward. This included participating in events, protests, meetings with Senegalese authorities and foreign embassies to lobby for a fairer migration policy and joining a 10-days activist campaign for freedom of movement all around Senegal, about

which I write in Chapter VIII. Moreover, it involved participating in the daily activities of some of these groups, including translating documents, jointly drafting grant applications and writing and proofreading materials for public events. Hence, I have been not only ideologically aligned with the struggle of the communities I worked with, but I have also taken an active part in it.

While my militant stance was key to bonding with the people I engaged with, this clear solidarity with resistance against state-imposed borders inevitably caused friction with local authorities, state agencies, and representatives of EU member states. The most telling episode of this is an attempt to censor my research at a conference on relations between Italy and Senegal, organised by the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar with the Italian Embassy. My contribution was highly contested as the Italian Embassy considered my research divisive. As a sign of disapproval, the Italian Embassy announced that no Embassy representative would be present the day of my presentation.

Accessing the Field and Relating to Participants

To address the diverse nature of colonial encounters between people in Senegal and border externalisation, this research is based on multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) within Senegal over a period of five months split into three research trips between 2023 and 2024. In line with Marcus's typology, my approach combines "following the people" across sites with "following the life/biography," tracing individual trajectories and lived experiences that reveal how border externalisation is encountered, negotiated, and reshaped over time. The purpose of multi-sited ethnography is to follow several aspects that constitute the field. In my case, this involved following the people both in locations where colonial encounters were most evident, such as at departure points along the coast and at the terrestrial borders, and in more intimate environments, such as people's homes. Initially, my research plans were confined to Dakar; however, recognising the importance of travelling outside the city as my network was expanding, I embraced a flexible approach to fieldwork, beginning to follow im/mobility trajectories across the country (Figure 1). Besides Dakar, I have conducted fieldwork in several places on the coast of Senegal, in the southern areas closer to The Gambia, in the regions of Thies and Fatick, as well as in the North in the area of St. Louis. Additionally, I have also conducted fieldwork in the interior of the country in remote villages in the regions of Diourbel and Kaolack, in the South of the country in the

regions of Ziguinchor and Kolda, as well as in the region of Tambacounda. In this context, my multi-sited fieldwork research has not consistently followed the same individuals over time and space (although this has also occurred in some cases). More frequently, it has tracked the locations where people have been before attempting to go to Europe or where they were born and their families reside. This allowed me to reconstruct mobility patterns and their encounters with the border without relying on specific individuals.

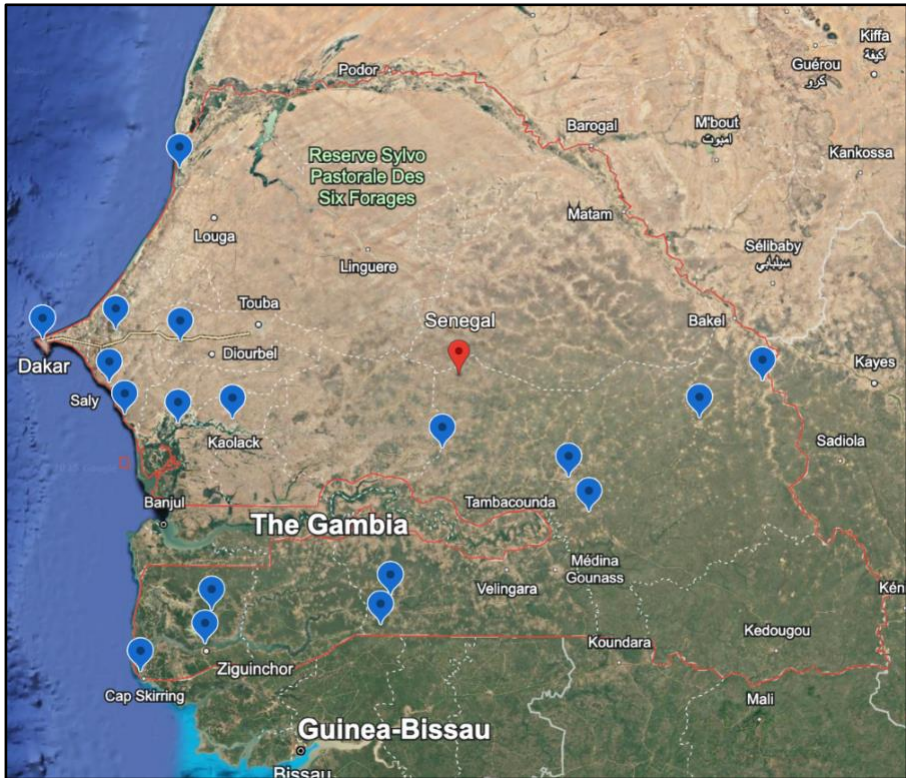


Figure 1. Key fieldwork locations

In these locations, and across five months, I engaged with over one hundred Senegalese nationals who, whether they had crossed borders or not, were directly or indirectly impacted by border externalisation and its far-reaching effects. Those who reached Europe and were returned had either entered with short-term visas or arrived by sea, either directly from Senegal or via North Africa. Most of my interlocutors, however, never reached Europe. Many tried to leave but were stopped by border guards, while others remained stranded in

North Africa or en route, ultimately forced to return home. Importantly, some never made concrete plans to travel to Europe but were nonetheless impacted by border externalisation in the form of EU-funded programs and campaigns designed to deter (supposed) future migration. Another significant group I engaged with includes relatives, friends, and community members of individuals who have migrated or attempted to do so. Finally, I also engaged with Senegalese individuals whose engagement with mobility was professional or political. Some were involved in the migration industry as a means of livelihood, such as recruiters, transport facilitators, or intermediaries; others were activists who engage with mobility as a political cause; others were staff members of civil society organisations working on migration and border issues. Across all these different groups, all participants were Senegalese, racialised as black, and aged between 18 and 60. While I engaged with both men and women, men were more accessible due to the patriarchal structure of Senegalese society and the male-dominated nature of migration from the country (Dia 2009). In terms of class, the majority of those I interviewed worked in the informal economy, few had completed secondary education, and many had minimal access to formal schooling. All in all, by engaging with similar actors across multiple sites and diverse colonial encounters, this project does not seek to construct a single cohesive narrative or make broadly generalisable claims. Instead, it draws on an ethnographic sensibility (Wedeen 2009) to capture the mosaic of experiences and perspectives that arise from each encounter, shaped both by the diversity of participants and the depth of interaction with them.

During the first part of my fieldwork (April–May 2023), I began building a network in Senegal through my connections in activist and volunteer groups in Italy. These groups had links between the two countries, and through friends and contacts from these networks, I was able to make my first connections. As time went on, these relationships organically expanded through the social worlds of those I first connected with, meeting their friends, families, and broader communities. Yet, given the heavy stigmatisation of “clandestine migration,” meeting people who had migrated was not straightforward and required time, trust-building, and the support of key gate-openers among my initial network. Introductions through mutual acquaintances often sparked enthusiasm, especially in remote areas where people were unaccustomed to researchers and journalists; many shared that no one had ever asked about their im/mobility experiences before, expressing genuine curiosity and interest in speaking with me. During my first and second stay (October–December 2024) I was also affiliated with the University of Dakar as a visiting researcher. This

initially helped establish contacts and gave me a recognisable status. While many were unfamiliar with Sweden or academic research, being “based” at one of the local universities made my role easier to explain. While I was connected with European organisations in Senegal, which occasionally helped me gain contextual insights through informal conversations, I deliberately refrained from recruiting participants through them to prevent the negative gatekeeping effect associated with specific ideas about mobility, and to address the misalignment of my political stances with the work carried out by many of these organisations, which could potentially lead to tensions and ethical dilemmas. The sole exception was my involvement with Open Arms, a Spanish sea rescue NGO, where I conducted participant observation and interviews with Senegalese social workers and school teachers engaged in a project aimed at discouraging irregular mobility.

Although I was always transparent that interviews would not be financially compensated as such, I sought to acknowledge people’s time and contributions in context-sensitive ways. I covered travel expenses, offered small tokens of appreciation like fruits, cookies, or sodas and similar gifts when visiting homes, and contributed to shared household items such as rice, oil, or onions. I also occasionally covered other expenses such as medicines, or provided small monetary compensation when someone interrupted their work to speak with me. These gestures were not predefined or standardised, but emerged organically through trust and reciprocity and part of my broader effort to resist the necessary extractivist tendencies of research in these contexts. Besides material forms of compensation, I would also share non-material forms of support, such as offering information about EU migration policies and do’s and don’t when arriving in Europe without a visa.

Ethical Issues

This project has been granted approval by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (2023-01503-01-407194). However, the ethical considerations go well beyond the institutionalised mechanism of ethical approval required by universities and deserve deeper reflections. Making clear the objectives of my research and ensuring that participation in my study was voluntary and informed was of course crucial. However, in a context in which most people cannot read and write in French, and my presence in the field was both mediated by my simultaneous role as a researcher and an activist, as well as the informal and unplanned nature of many encounters, this was not always

easy. Employing various strategies became imperative to ensure individuals understood the nature of their conversations with me and the potential outcomes that might arise from them. In general, with the exception of more formal meetings with a few organisations at the beginning of my research, the participant information sheet and informed consent sheet turned out to be quite inappropriate. To many, formal sheets seemed to resonate as a bureaucratic imposition, to the extent that when I initially attempted to use them, there was a sense of discomfort and bother in having to go through it. Similarly, despite having prepared an additional document intended for oral communication with participants who lacked literacy skills, I ultimately chose not to employ it. Instead, I chose to prioritise dedicating time to discussing my research, detailing the subsequent steps with the gathered information, and addressing any questions people might have. Due to the informal nature of many encounters, getting informed consent was neither necessarily a linear process, nor always happened at the beginning of my interaction with someone. For example, many times, I was worried that individuals I developed closer connections with, when engaging in conversations encompassing both work-related and unrelated matters might inadvertently overlook my role as a researcher. In these cases, whenever I found it appropriate, I would casually remind them about my research and, if pertinent to the conversation, ask if I could include some of the things discussed in my thesis.

An important element of an ethical approach to research is to be aware of the sensitivity of the topic spoken, and sense when people do not want to talk about a certain issue (Horst 2006). This means respecting people's right not to talk about something that is emotionally distressing for them and being attuned to when this might happen through body language and other signs, and not only when this is expressed explicitly. Due to the nature of the conversations, I often found myself in situations where people would start crying, be hesitant or express discomfort. In such situations, I would respect those moments by abstaining from posing questions, making it clear that we could shift the topic or conclude the conversation altogether if they preferred. Furthermore, being attuned to people's emotions involves respecting their right to withhold certain information and accepting that some things may be voluntarily omitted or modified. Indeed, "a decolonised approach commands us to show sensibilities towards [people's] fundamental right to opacity, that is, that not everything should be seen, explained, understood, and documented" (Khosravi 2018: 116). In this context, an ethical approach to research entails also recognising that some of the data shared is sensitive and has the potential to be used against the person sharing them. This applies both to sensitive information that could

potentially endanger individuals in Senegal (such as instances when people shared details about activities like facilitating passage to Europe or captaining boats, which is a punishable crime in Senegal and Europe), as well as situations where individuals divulged tactics and strategies to avoid detection when attempting to cross the sea or borders. Naturally, this also involves protecting the identities of individuals by ensuring anonymity in all cases by using pseudonyms, except where the interviewee has explicitly expressed willingness to be named directly, or is a publicly known figure. To protect some of the interviewees, some empirical details have been changed where this would not alter the analysis.

Data Sources, Types and Forms

The material for this study is collected primarily through ethnographic methods consisting of participant observation and informal everyday interactions, eighty-seven dialogical interviews (see Appendix) and fieldwork notes. All in all, this material captures both different stages of im/mobility and different interactions with the externalised borders, encompassing a whole range of perspectives, which is in line with the idea that border externalisation has a diffused impact and encounters people's everyday life in very different ways.

Dialogical interviews

I use the term dialogical to describe interviews conducted as open conversations between myself and participants, creating a space for mutual knowledge sharing, active participation, and genuine dialogue rather than formal questioning. Many interviews were biographical, semi-structured or somewhere in between. Biographical storytelling focuses on how people narrate their life experiences and construct meaning, emphasising not only the events they recount but also the introspective and performative aspects of narration, as their aim is to understand and explain people's social realities (Gray and Dagg 2019). Biographical and storytelling-based methods are also effective for capturing emotionally charged knowledge, such as that surrounding mobility, because they enable reflection on gendered, racial, and social dynamics. Crucially, they also centre individual subjectivities in a political way: rather than striving for objective truths, these interviews explore

the realities participants construct in relation to themselves and decide to share with the researcher. While biographical storytelling invites participants to speak freely around a theme (e.g. their story of mobility) with minimal questioning, semi-structured interviews rely more on researcher-led questioning, though still allowing room for participant direction (Ackerly and True 2019). In practice, the interviews conducted for this research often blended both approaches. Many began biographically, then incorporated semi-structured prompts when more directed engagement felt appropriate. Rather than covering entire life histories, interviews typically focused on a specific point in time, such as the decision to migrate, the disappearance of a relative, or a return to Senegal, from which individuals were encouraged to narrate their stories. These narratives commonly moved across three temporal axes: the past (life circumstances and aspirations before the journey), the migration experience itself, and the present and future as participants saw them (life after migration and future plans).

Generally, the biographical mode was more prominent in one-on-one interviews with people who had migrated or attempted to, and their relatives, where capturing personal stories, emotions, and lived experiences was central. In contrast, semi-structured interviews were mainly used with members of civil society organisations and collectives, where my focus was less on individual life trajectories and more on the organisation's operations, goals, and perspectives on im/mobility. Semi-structured interviews were also employed in group settings, often involving two or three individuals, such as family members of those attempting to migrate to Europe, or friends who travelled together. In these instances, guiding the conversation through questions was essential to ensuring a balanced interaction and mitigating the tendency for more extroverted speakers, often influenced by gender dynamics, from disproportionately dominating the discussion. Group discussions also allowed for a deeper understanding of the collective and relational dimensions of im/mobility. While most participants were interviewed only once, I conducted multiple interviews with a few interlocutors with whom I developed closer relationships, using these follow-ups to revisit earlier conversations and exchange insights as my research progressed.

I conducted interviews in a range of languages, including French, English, Italian and Spanish, sometimes blending multiple languages in a single conversation. Approximately one third of the interviews were also conducted in Wolof or Pular, with an interpreter, to make the conversation easier for some of the interlocutors living outside the main cities. These conversations were

recorded, with participant consent, and later translated for greater accuracy. Although relying on translation introduced limitations, such as the loss of spontaneous interaction or subtleties in expression, it was ultimately a necessary choice to ensure participants could speak in the language they felt most comfortable with. In some cases, the presence of a third person even helped foster trust or clarify cultural nuances. Additionally, attention to non-verbal and embodied communication, such as gestures, silences, facial expressions, tone, gazes, laughter, or emotional pauses, proved essential in enriching and contextualising participants' narratives.

Interviews were always open-ended, meaning that they started with broad and general questions and then zoomed into specific aspects based on the responses. During the preparation of the research several interview guides were prepared according to the specific relation that the participant would have with im/mobility and borders. These guides remained flexible, adapting to the specificities and sensibilities of each interviewee as they emerged during the dialogue. Shaped by early fieldwork, they evolved over time, incorporating insights gained from everyday interactions and interviews to inform subsequent conversations. Naturally, some individuals chose to delve into personal aspects during the interview, openly discussing emotions, fears, aspirations, and political stances, while others opted to focus more on chronological and narrative events, leaving out intimate details. The interview approach empowered participants to shape the conversation by sharing what they considered relevant, while my interventions remained minimal and strategic, allowing for the emergence of new insights and enabling participants to refine my research questions and definitions, both through direct feedback and by noting down the concepts and themes they prioritised. The length of the interviews varied very much according to the conversation dynamic created between myself and the interlocutor(s). They ranged from brief sessions of twenty minutes (often hindered by language constraints) to several hours, including instances where the conversation extended throughout an entire day or even across multiple days, often continuing when the recording was paused. While the great majority of the interviews were recorded with participants' consent, recording was avoided on a few occasions when it risked disrupting the trust established or when it was not feasible due to noise. In such cases, I took detailed notes during or immediately after the conversation. These non-recorded interviews were treated with equal care and accuracy: I remained highly attentive, mentally noted key points, and often repeated them during the exchange to confirm understanding.

To biographical storytelling and semi-structured interviews, I should add countless hours of informal conversation with both the same people with whom I conducted formal interviews, as well as with people I would meet casually in the streets, in people's homes, at the market, at the university, at the beach etc. Furthermore, with those individuals with whom I developed a closer connection, I maintained occasional communication through digital means, such as social media and messaging even when physically distant from Senegal. This not only allowed me to keep contact with some people, but sometimes it also proved to be a way through which I inadvertently gathered important information about people's stories and contexts, as well as a follow up in their lives and im/mobility trajectories. Naturally, informal conversations also derived from interaction with different people in the field which although not directly research participants (researchers, journalists, European workers on migration), proved nevertheless invaluable for context and shared reflections.

Participant observation

Participant observation "involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think and act in ways that are different [from that of the researchers]. Rather than studying people, [participant observation] means learning from people" (Spradley 1980:3). In addition to gathering individual and collective narratives, extensive participant observation was carried out through ongoing informal interactions in everyday settings, such as people's homes, neighbourhoods, markets, universities, beaches, and events related to mobility. These everyday situations served to situate participants' stories within the broader, lived realities of im/mobility, offering crucial context and deepening the understanding of how mobility is experienced and negotiated in daily life individually and collectively. Rather than functioning merely as a method, it became a relational practice allowing immersion into daily life and complementing the insights drawn from interviews with embodied, situated knowledge. This approach was significantly facilitated by connections with grassroots organisations, collectives, and individuals across Senegal which helped me access sensitive contexts, both geographically and socially, that may have otherwise been difficult to access.

The term participant observation is used here as an umbrella for a wide range of ethnographic engagements, spanning from passive observation to active participation, depending on the context. At times, observation took a more

distant form, such as attending events related to migration without direct involvement due to linguistic or contextual constraints, or discreetly witnessing the preparation of boats intended for Europe. It also included taking part in so-called “awareness raising” activities as a witness. In other settings, I took on a more participatory role by accompanying recently repatriated individuals as they navigated reintegration programs or reunited with their families for the first time. Extended stays outside Dakar and repeated visits to the same villages or the same people strengthened my ties within communities, often creating more opportunities for participating in people’s lives through invitations into private homes and involvement in local gatherings, including religious ceremonies and family celebrations. In other instances, still, participation became direct and active, especially during collective actions with local organisations (Chapter VIII). These layered forms of involvement were key to accessing embodied, relational, and culturally grounded knowledge that formal interviews alone could not reveal. By participating in everyday interactions and witnessing how people navigated the consequences of im/mobility and return, I was better able to understand how border externalisation shapes mobility as a lived and socially negotiated practice within Senegalese communities.

Fieldwork diary

Informal conversations and everyday interactions formed a substantial part of the data collection process, making the fieldwork diary a central component of the methodological approach. The diary served as a vital tool for capturing observations that escaped formal interviews, including gestures, silences, interpersonal dynamics, and the situated construction of black mobility practice, whether political, imagined, or embodied. It functioned as a space to document not only events but also the emotions, tensions, and reflections that unfolded in the field, both from those involved and from my own situated perspective. The diary took multiple forms: written notes, voice recordings, photographs, and videos. While entries were not compiled daily, documentation occurred regularly, often several times per week. Notes were typically taken throughout the day using a mobile app, with keywords, phrases, or short sentences to anchor key moments, later expanded upon in longer reflections. Voice recordings, especially when physical or emotional exhaustion prevented writing, offered a rich sensory memory, allowing the atmosphere of the moment to be reaccessed through background sounds and intonations. Engagement with visual documentation, photos and videos

evolved over time. Initially avoided out of concern for respect, visuals later emerged as important tools for contextual grounding, particularly when visiting significant sites of im/mobility such as departure beaches and boatyards. While not analysed as primary data, images provided essential cues for remembering and reconstructing narratives. This shift toward visual engagement was also shaped relationally, encouraged by interlocutors who viewed photography as a way to preserve memories or to better communicate their realities to wider audiences. In this sense, visual methods were integrated cautiously and relationally, guided by ongoing negotiations of trust, consent, and mutual understanding.

The Use of Narratives

Narrative methodology is a qualitative approach that understands human experience through the stories people tell, foregrounding the subjective construction of meaning and recognising storytelling as a powerful site of knowledge production (Somers, 1994; Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou 2008; Andrews, Kinnvall, & Monroe 2015). Rather than seeking a singular truth, narrative approaches attend to how people, individually and collectively, interpret their own lived realities (Squire et al. 2014). I approach narrative as a methodology that not only centres lived experience but also interrogates the conditions under which stories are told, heard, and rendered intelligible (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou 2008), particularly in relation to black mobility, border violence, and the global racial ordering of movement.

Following Riessman (2008), I use the term narrative to refer to three interconnected aspects: the practice of storytelling, the narrative data that constitutes my empirical material, and the thematic narrative analysis, namely, the systematic and analytical study of these narratives. If narratives are stories that shape our understanding of reality and the social world we inhabit, they are inherently political acts, making claims about power and agency (Erwin 2021). In the context of this thesis, the political act is reflected not only in my decision to share the narratives of people with lived and embodied experiences of im/mobility, but also in the choice of those very individuals to narrate their own stories. By sharing their experiences, they assert a form of agency that challenges dominant narratives, particularly those of the state and its agents, which often dominate political and academic discussions about mobility. Their willingness to share these stories with me and allow them to travel to spaces

where they would otherwise remain unheard is itself a political act of agency. Stories which come from the experiences of those who resist colonial power are decolonisation theory in its most natural form, as they are insurgent moments in which the dispossessed reclaim epistemic ground (Sium and Ritske 2013).

As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz puts it, we cannot live other people's lives, nor should we try to do so (in Koshravi 2018). Instead, we can only aspire to "scratch the surface" (Geertz 1986: 373) by listening in images, words, feeling and actions what people have to say about their lives. Thus, when writing about people's stories, I neither pretend to be able to account for the complexities and nuances that only those who have experienced it can convey, nor pretend to give voice to the subjects through an unmediated account. This means acknowledging that the narratives presented here are relational and co-constructed, shaped both by people's efforts to make their experiences of im/mobility intelligible to someone like me (who does not share them firsthand) and by my own interpretive lens as I engaged with their knowledge and worldviews in our intersubjective encounters. For this reason, I conceived of and analysed as narratives both people's stories captured during interviews and participant observation, but also my own notes in the fieldwork diary, observations, the rewriting of unrecorded interviews from my memory and the annotation of feelings, emotions and intuitions. Besides, my own narration, which comes out from the text by way of anecdotes, images and situations experienced in the field, is important in itself as these events should be intended as moments of disruptions that reoriented my own knowledge and understanding of im/mobility (Michael 2012). Such moments disrupt pre-existing frameworks and prompt "methodological and theoretical" reorientation of the research (Michael 2012:29). Moreover, the presence of my own narrative through anecdotes makes my presence in the field more transparent and sheds light on the biases that I inevitably carry within the stories I interpret.

Narrative Data Analysis

Consistent with my theoretical framework, I have approached the analysis of empirical narrative data using an abductive approach, which Timmermans and Tavory (2012: 170) describe as "an inferential, creative process of generating new theories based on unexpected research findings." Abductive reasoning sits between inductive and deductive approaches by focusing not simply on the movement from data to theory (as in induction) or from theory to data (as in

deduction), but on developing situated and meaningful interpretations in response to surprising or unexpected observations. It is thus a logic of discovery that is both empirically grounded and open to theoretical innovation, acknowledging the situated, interpretive, and iterative nature of research (Brinkmann 2014). In ethnography, this means that empirical observations and theoretical insights inform one another in a dialogical process, as the researcher moves back and forth between data collection and analysis. Through this process, I refined my understanding of im/mobility and generated insights that could not be derived from existing theoretical frameworks alone (Bates 2021).

Abduction also foregrounds the positionality of the researcher and the partial nature of knowledge, requiring openness to the unexpected and an analytical stance shaped by one's biography, theoretical sensibilities, and political commitments (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 173). As such, abductive reasoning aligns closely with decolonial feminist research by enabling a flexible, iterative, and situated mode of inquiry that resists totalising frameworks, embraces uncertainty, and centers marginalised voices and lived experiences as sites of partial, embodied, and politically entangled knowledge. The findings presented in this thesis are thus the result of an ongoing abductive process shaped by both prior theoretical knowledge and the insights that emerged through ethnographic engagement, including the narratives shared by participants, my observations, and my own involvement with local communities and associations. For example, although I began the research with "border" as a central analytical lens, it was through engaging with people's everyday realities that I came to see "mobility" as a more grounded and appropriate tool that better captured the complexity of aspirations, constraints, and movements shaping people's lives.

To analyse the narrative data, I chose thematic narrative analysis as a method that aligns well with my abductive research logic, enabling a continual movement between theory, interview material, and field observations recorded in my diary. This approach, which interrogates the "what" of the interviews is also particularly well-suited for analysing narrative and biographical accounts, as it allows main themes to emerge directly from people's stories, while also accommodating the emergence of several sub-themes and contextual elements. Moreover, it allows attentiveness not only to what is told, but how it is told, including pauses, tone, emotion, and silences, all of which shape the meaning-making process and reflect the context and stakes of narration (Riessman 2008). Furthermore, while data analysis often involves fragmenting data into short, coded segments, potentially disrupting the coherence of the overall

narrative, thematic narrative analysis preserves the coherence and sequencing of stories, allowing interpretation to remain grounded in how narratives are told and minimising decontextualisation (Riessman, 2008). In line with a narrative analysis approach, I closely engaged with all transcribed interviews, written fieldnotes, and descriptive accounts. My aim was to identify patterns in how mobility is embodied, political, and imagined across different narratives. I paid particular attention to how people make sense of their mobility experiences, how they position themselves within broader structures of power, and how stories of movement are shaped by affect, temporality, and social relations.

The data analysis has been carried out into four closely related steps. The first phase of data analyses consisted in the transcription of the interview data and some recorded participants observations. The transcriptions were initially done in French, and any quotes or expressions from the material that appear in the thesis were translated into English only later, as analysing the material in the original language allowed me to better preserve the original meaning. For interviews conducted in Wolof or Pulaar, transcription and translation into French were carried out with the assistance of qualified translators. I transcribed all the interview material either immediately after or, in some cases, during the fieldwork, ensuring the conversations were still fresh in my mind. This allowed me to recall and annotate contextual details that might otherwise get lost. To support the transcription process, I used software such as Sonix and Whisper to generate initial automated transcripts in French, which I then carefully reviewed and edited. Transcription was not treated as a neutral or purely technical task but as an integral part of the process of narrative analysis. It enabled an early stage of interpretation and helped me begin identifying emerging themes and patterns. While still in the field, transcribing also gave me the opportunity to refine some interview questions and, in certain cases, revisit participants to clarify points that had not been fully captured.

The second phase of data analysis involved meticulously rereading the interviews multiple times to familiarise myself with the large volume of data collected. This process was repeated after each of the three fieldwork phases and again once all the narrative material had been gathered. Through this close engagement with the material, I began a preliminary, manual coding of the data, loosely identifying and noting down emerging themes and patterns. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), I focused on themes that appeared important, surprising, recurrent, emotionally resonant or particularly striking. As I read through the interviews again and again, I asked myself what kind of

encounter with border externalisation each narrative represented, identifying cross-cutting themes that framed mobility practice as imagined, embodied, or political, expressed with varying intensity across the different types of encounters identified. This early manual coding phase was instrumental in allowing me to return to my theoretical framework and refine it in dialogue with the empirical material. In line with the abductive logic outlined above, I began refining the emerging themes, which allowed me to gain a clearer overview of the data and to organise it into more manageable data subsets, each of which would later form the basis for a separate empirical chapter. The chapters' themes thus emerged through a bottom-up, data-driven process that reflected the realities of fieldwork and the diverse types of encounters revealed through interviews and observations captured in my fieldwork diary.

Building on the initial manual analysis, I transitioned to a systematic coding process using NVivo, as the volume of narrative data, amounting to several hundred pages of transcribed interviews, would have been unmanageable otherwise. Rather than coding all interviews and material as a single corpus, I divided the interview material according to the main themes that had emerged during the first phase, organising them in alignment with the division of the empirical chapters. For example, the dataset for Chapter IV included all interviews, as the type of encounter explored (imagined) was relevant across all participants (regardless of whether they travelled or not). The dataset for Chapter V focused only on interviews with those who had physically undertaken the journey, while Chapter VI drew only on data from people who had experienced forced return (for instance, interviews with people who returned voluntarily were not coded to this effect). Chapter VII included material from interviews with families and women who had lost loved ones at sea, and Chapter VIII was based exclusively on data collected during the 10-day activist campaign. This division enabled focused thematic coding within each chapter through a tiered structure of overarching, secondary, and tertiary codes, while preserving coherence with the overall analytical framework. This structured coding process also prompted refinements to the thesis structure itself: for instance, Chapters IV, V, and VI were initially conceived together, but the coding revealed the depth and richness of the material, justifying their separation into distinct chapters.

After coding with NVivo, I conducted a final round of manual coding. This step was essential to capture nuances and the narrative coherence that often exceeded what could be expressed through NVivo codes alone. I returned to selected interviews, chosen for vividly illustrating recurrent themes and

patterns previously identified, and re-coded them manually for each chapter, frequently cross-referencing the transcripts with my fieldwork diary to recover the context, emotions, and observations that shaped the interview moment. This iterative process enabled me to combine thematic narrative analysis with ethnographic methods, including thick description and the interpretation of participant observation and fieldnotes.

Chapter IV: Desire for an Elsewhere: Imagining Im/mobility

Bocar and I sit side by side on a thin, worn mattress in his room in the family house located in a traditional fishing village several kilometres from Dakar. Just a month prior to our meeting, he boarded a pirogue in an attempt to reach Europe. It was his third try. Like the previous ones, it did not work. Still, he is determined to try again. Having spent most of his life working as a fisherman, following in the footsteps of his father, Bocar only knows the sea. As the firstborn in the family, he has one younger brother two sisters to care for, and like most young people of his generation, he dreams of going to Europe to care for them. “As soon as I find the money, I’ll try once more,” he says with quiet resolve. “Actually, if you give me the money, I’ll go tomorrow,” he laughs. I am struck by his determination and ask what it is about Europe that keeps drawing him back to this dangerous journey again and again. “When I think of Europe, I imagine a life I can’t have here,” he explains. “A chance to earn enough to follow my dreams and help my parents. I don’t want to end up like my father,” he sighs, gesturing around the modest room, then adds: “A lifetime of hard work, and this is all he’s built. I’m grateful, but I want more for myself, and for my parents as well, so they can finally rest and stop struggling every day.” I tell him that Europe is not all sunshine and roses, that finding a job can be tough and that I have been struggling to find a job myself after graduating. “Yeah, you think we don’t know how it is for us black over there,” he says, with the tone of someone who has heard this argument many times but remained unconvinced, “but I know, I know it’s not easy in Europe either. My best friend is in Spain, and I’ve seen how he lives. It’s tough sometimes, yes, but even that is better than what we have here.” Now, I am the one intrigued by his answer, so I ask: “So, no matter what happens, you’ll keep trying again and again until you make it to Europe?” “Of course!” he laughs, “if I find a pirogue, I leave tomorrow! I’ll keep trying until I make it to Europe or end up in the grave. It’s Europe or the grave.”

As the conversation with Bocar shows, where he speaks of imagining a life in Europe that he cannot have in Senegal, the act of mobility begins with the belief that another life is possible. Among the youth I engaged with, this vision of a life elsewhere is widely shared. While increased border externalisation has pushed some to travel to different places (Yates and Bolter 2021), Europe remains the primary imagined destination for many Senegalese. This is not only due to geographical proximity but also to entrenched post-colonial ties manifested in transnational families, popular culture, education, and social networks, which reinforce a certain idea many still hold of life in Europe. This imaginary is so powerful that in Senegal, the expression *yeeg na kaaw*, meaning “he has climbed,” is used to invoke the departure to Europe, carrying both a geographical connotation of going upwards, since the *kaaw* countries are at higher latitudes relative to Senegal, and a metaphorical implication of social ascension and success (Sall 2011). This chapter advances our understanding of how imagining, both as individual imagination and collective social imaginaries, shapes mobility in contexts marked by imposed borders. Imagining motivates mobility by allowing individuals to envision alternative futures elsewhere, while mobility itself sustains and transforms these imaginaries through shared migration experiences and socio-cultural dynamics and gender norms. Through this dynamic interplay, mobility emerges not only as a physical act but as an imagined practice deeply embedded in the colonial encounter between border externalisation and people’s lived realities. This chapter examines how mobility practice as imagined is shaped by border closures, gender, family dynamics, and broader socio-cultural contexts, highlighting how individuals and communities envision movement, its meanings, destinations, and possibilities amid structural constraints.

Studies on migration in West Africa highlight how mobility is embedded in social imaginaries, shaped by historical continuities and aspirations tied to global modernity (Ménard and Bedert 2021). In Senegal, scholars have analysed the power of imagining showing how, beyond economic reasons, the mobility of young Senegalese is also shaped by a symbolic imaginary that evokes a longstanding “desire for elsewhere” (Schapendonk and van Moppes 2007; Diop 2008; Mbodji 2008; Fouquet 2008; Willems 2013; Ngom 2017; Degli Umberti and Riccio 2017; Hann 2020). Others have examined how such an idea is historically rooted in memories of Senegalese colonial soldiers in France (Mourre 2018). Some scholars have further examined the sociocultural foundations of migration imaginaries in Senegal, arguing that, beyond sustaining solidarity networks, migration can also be imagined as a way to escape their constraints (Willens 2013). Focusing on aspirations, scholars have

also explored why young Senegalese are willing to risk their lives on dangerous journeys, highlighting the interplay of structural constraints, personal ambition, and shifting socio-political dynamics in the country (Tandian and Tall 2010, Ngom 2021, Hernández Carretero & Carling 2012). Building on these studies, this chapter examines the encounter between border externalisation and people's immobility as shaped by imagination and imaginaries through the theoretical lens of mobility practice as imagined.

The chapter is divided into three sections, each exploring a different facet of mobility practice as imagined, shedding light on how people conceptualise and make sense of movement: the imaginaries of *tekki*, the imaginary of Europe, and the imaginary of accessible routes. The first section explores *tekki*, a Wolof term meaning “to succeed” or “to make it in life”, which emerges as a foundational logic underpinning mobility practice as imagined. *Tekki* shapes not only the decision to move but also what counts as success and how mobility is perceived as a viable means to achieve it, grounding mobility practice within a culturally specific framework of social achievement and personal transformation. The second section turns to participants' imaginary of Europe, often envisioned as a mythical El Dorado. This vision is deeply embedded in long-standing power hierarchies and colonial logics that construct Europe as *kaaw*, a place of upward social mobility and prosperity, while positioning Africa at the bottom of a global racialised order. The imaginary of Europe functions not only as a geographic destination but as a symbolic site where racialised hierarchies, historical inequalities, and desires for recognition intersect, shaping mobility practice as imagined by framing how people envision their future selves in Europe. The third section explores how people collectively imagine alternative routes to Europe when legal and safe channels are inaccessible. In these spaces, stories of visa scams, dangerous journeys, and obstacles circulate, becoming normalised and shaping collective ideas of what mobility can look like under constraints. This constitutes a third element of mobility practice as imagined, reflecting how the feasibility of travel is continuously negotiated through everyday social interactions and shared narratives.

The Imaginary of *Tekki*

In conversations about plans to move to Europe, a phrase in Wolof often emerged, *dem rek pour tekki*, which translates to “just go to succeed.” For

many young Senegalese, leaving is imagined as the primary, if not only, path to achieving *tekki*, success in life. Within the Senegalese society, which operates within a strong patriarchal framework that places great emphasis on kinship relationships (Mondain 2017), success is generally associated less with the pursuit of individual aspirations and more with the fulfilment of societal expectations deeply shaped by gender norms (Mbodji 2008). For men, *tekki* is fully realised only when fulfilling the role of breadwinner and taking responsibility for their household, which includes marriage and raising children, as well as providing for elderly parents. In this patriarchal and family-oriented context, women's *tekki* is intricately connected to their marital status and reproductive labour, as well as their duty to care for in-laws once they move into their husband's family home. As these expectations are perceived as being unattainable at home, the idea of *tekki* is increasingly associated with traveling, and especially with migration to Europe (Ngom 2018). While societal and gender expectations do not rigidly determine mobility practice as imagined, they significantly shape it. Yet, individuals can actively reinterpret what *tekki* means in light of their own experiences, priorities, and values, sometimes aligning with dominant norms, other times challenging them, thereby producing diverse and evolving understandings of success that inform mobility practice as imagined. In the following two sections, I explore two distinct articulations of *tekki*. The first, *tekki* for the family, reveals how mobility practice as imagined is shaped by the expectation to provide for one's kin. The second, explores *tekki* as a desire to break free from social stagnation, from the weight of patriarchal norms, or simply in pursuit of a more self-determined life. Each reveals how mobility practice is imagined not only as economic advancement, but as a means of negotiating one's place within or beyond existing social norms and gender structures.

“We Make It to Ease the Family's Burden”: *Tekki* and Socio-Cultural Expectations

“Here, when you are the eldest and you have a family, everyone will rely on you. Everyone will know that you are the support of the family. You know, every family has a support system. If you are the support of the family, you will have the mission of going [to Europe] to help your family.”

Nafissatou, a woman in her twenties from a village in the Kolda region, speaks quietly but firmly as she describes her family's situation while we sit together on plastic chairs outside her modest family home. She explains that her older

brother, Cheick, works as a street vendor in Dakar, trying to save enough money to attempt the journey to Europe. Each month, he sends a small sum back home, but it is not nearly enough to support the entire household. Nafissatou does not conceal that she hopes her brother will eventually succeed in reaching Europe, with the expectation that his success would improve the family's situation as a whole. As the firstborn son, Cheick bears heavy pressure, reflecting Senegal's family hierarchy where young men, especially the eldest son, are culturally expected to provide for and support their parents (Mbodji 2008). For many, like Nafissatou's brother, migrating to Europe becomes the only way to meet the socio-economic responsibilities expected from them in adulthood. This is also the case for Demba, a man in his mid-thirties who moved to Europe on a short-term visa in 2019. After overstaying, he was eventually arrested and forcibly returned to Senegal. Coming from a modest family in the suburbs of Dakar, Demba carries the weight of responsibility for two younger sisters, a younger brother, and aging parents. Long before he left for Europe, his mobility aspirations were shaped by a broader kinship logic in which success is defined through the ability to care for others, as he recalls:

“In Africa, it's not like it is in Europe. We have a large family. When you're grown, your life is not just about you. Your parents, brothers and sisters are also part of it. I have two brothers and two sisters. Psychologically and morally, I have the responsibility to support them. The same goes for my parents, it's not like in Europe, where you're retired and you get money from your pension. My father was a policeman, he is lucky to have at least a small pension from retirement, but that's not enough to support the whole family. So I have to support them, and that was also why I needed to exit [to Europe]”.

For both Nafissatou and Demba, mobility practice as imagined is understood not just as individual success but as a collective achievement for the entire family, a pathway to shared upward social mobility, where aspirations to geographical mobility equals social mobility.

Beyond representing social mobility for the whole family, *tekki* within this framework takes on a moral dimension, becoming a social measure by which individuals are judged. Failure to fulfil these responsibilities is not only seen as an economic setback but as a personal and ethical shortcoming within the community. This is vividly illustrated by Souleymane, a young man in his early twenties from Casamance, who attempted to leave by pirogue in the hope of improving his family's situation out of a deep sense of moral obligation:

“We travel to make it. And making it means easing the burden on the family a little. That’s what pushes us to go. This is difficult sometimes, because in Africa our family is everything we have. In Africa, family is elastic. The family is large. If you don’t do something for the family, it’s not good. You’re not a good person. We say: they have done everything for you, and what do you give them in return? So you have to sacrifice for the family.”

As Souleymane’s words convey, the notion of *tekki* is inseparable from the idea of personal sacrifice for the collective good of the family, making this form of self-sacrifice central to how mobility is imagined. As such, the pressure to achieve *tekki* is not only deeply ingrained in young people’s minds but is also reinforced by the families.

One afternoon, I return to Bocar’s home, shortly after his second attempt to reach Europe by sea. The sandy path leading to the compound is quiet, punctuated only by the metallic clatter of cooking pots. In the courtyard of their modest, unplastered house, Bocar’s parents welcome me and offer a stool to sit with them in the shade. As the conversation turns to Bocar’s recent journey, his mother, Khadidiatou, adjusts her headscarf with a slow, deliberate movement. She fixes her eyes on mine, holding the gaze as she speaks:

“I know my son will try to go again, especially given the situation in the country. For everyone the best thing in life is to wake up with your family, but if you see your parents struggling every day and you cannot help when there are financial problems, it’s hard. I do not want him to leave and sacrifice himself for us, because my life is already over. But I encourage him to succeed for himself, for his future. The suffering we have lived through, the suffering Bocar grew up with, I do not want that to continue for him, so he has to fight for his future.”

Khadidiatou is visibly preoccupied at the thought that Bocar might leave again at any moment. Her hands fidget with the edge of her head scarf as she speaks. She knows she cannot stop him, so instead she encourages him, offering the only thing she can: her blessing. Bocar sits nearby, in the corner of the courtyard, quiet and attentive, listening without interrupting.

“And if he makes it to Europe?” I ask.

“*Inshallah!*” she responds, a glimmer of hope lighting up her eyes.

“If he makes it, I expect him to try and find work in good conditions, and not to do what others do...” She trails off, her voice lowering slightly, alluding to stories of young men who end up in activities considered *haram*, like drug dealing. “After that,” she adds, “he should look back, because in order to move forward, you need to look behind; the past shapes the present. His past is still here with his family, so once he is in Europe, he should think of his brothers who cannot go to school, who have nothing, and he must help them too. He will also eventually need to think about having a wife and a family here.”

As Khadidiatou speaks, Bocar’s father, Bamba, sits quietly next to us, his hands resting on his knees, listening without interruption. His silence feels intentional, as though he is waiting for the right moment to claim the last word. When he finally speaks, his voice is calm but edged with the gravity of authority and expectation, the kind that does not need to be raised to command attention. At the sound of his father’s voice, Bocar shifts closer, leaning in ever so slightly, as if drawn by the weight of what is about to be said:

“First and foremost, for Bocar’s success, once he arrives in Europe, it is not his mother or father’s place to tell him what to do, because he’s a man and he knows very well what he needs to do. The second thing is that he should never forget that there is no true reality without the family. In Africa, the most fundamental reality is the parents. Once you help the parents, you’ve helped the whole family. But you can’t help others first. Parents are the roots of the tree. So if you want the tree to grow, you must first water the roots, and the roots are the parents. A child must follow the reality of their family. Once he arrives in Europe, he must not forget his parents. If he eventually succeeds, it is because of his mother and father. His parents will always be your parents, no matter where you live.”

The remarks of Bocar’s parents clearly illustrate how *tekki* is embedded in family expectations, with the burden of this aspiration falling especially heavily on male children. In this sense, mobility practice as imagined emerges as a deeply relational project that binds together kinship, gendered responsibility, and collective hope, where the act of moving becomes a way of sustaining family honour and redistributing obligations. For a man, therefore, mobility practice as imagined is contingent on fulfilling three prescribed gendered milestones: providing for the family, securing a wife, and having children. This is vividly illustrated in the words of Saliou, Ndongso and Lamine, all young fishermen in their early twenties from the same coastal village, who

have all made several unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe. As they recount their experiences, a profound sense of frustration emerges around their inability to fulfil what they see as a natural and urgent obligation for a man. This ongoing struggle weighs heavily on their sense of masculinity and social identity, and it is this pressure that ultimately fuels their resolve to leave, as evident in our conversation.

Saliou: “I wake up with nothing. My mother asks me for something, and sometimes my sisters or younger brothers ask me for something. But I can’t give it to them, and that hurts. Here, if you’re a man, it means you’re carrying heavy responsibilities for your family. There are many things placed on your shoulders. As a man, for your dignity, you’re expected to contribute to the household, and when you can’t, it stresses you out. [...] Honestly, that really keeps you up at night. It leads to frustration, and that’s part of what drives us to try to succeed in Europe.”

Ndongo: “The way we are living right now, if we continue like this, we will never succeed. We are meant to be fathers, to lead a family, to marry and to have children one day [...] If we don’t, we will lose in life, our future will be lost. That’s why we need to take our destiny in our own hands, like men, and go to Europe”.

Lamine: “Because you see, in our situation, finding a woman is complicated...I don’t want to get married, I’m afraid of getting married because if you marry and don’t have money, it’s a big problem... At my age, I should be getting married; my family pressures me to marry and have children, but in this situation, without a job, I can’t get married.”

While societal expectations in Senegal traditionally place the pressure to succeed for the family primarily on men, making them more likely to envision mobility as a pathway to *tekki*, some women are increasingly assuming breadwinner roles, subverting multiple layers of gender expectations: economic dependence on men (Antoine and Sow 2000), cultural restrictions on women’s mobility (Dia 2009), and the traditional vision of *tekki* for women as being fulfilled through becoming good wives and mothers (Babou 2008). This shift is driven by intersecting factors such as prolonged economic crises, the declining capacity of men to meet household needs, and broader social, educational, and cultural changes that have empowered women to claim greater financial autonomy and decision-making power (Dianka 2015). Although autonomous female mobility is still perceived as an exception, these developments are reshaping how mobility practice as imagined takes form,

with migration increasingly emerging as a viable, though often contested, pathway to success for women, particularly those unmarried or divorced. Aicha, Ramatoulaye and Fanta's stories illustrate this evolving landscape by revealing how gender shapes the ways women imagine and pursue mobility as a means to achieve success for their families, just like men.

Aicha is a young woman in her twenties from a rural village in Casamance, the firstborn daughter in a monogamous household with three younger brothers. After her father's death, it became clear to her that her mother could not provide for the family's basic needs. Faced with mounting pressure, Aicha saw only two possibilities: to marry a much older man chosen for her, or to leave for Europe in search of a better life. Sitting on a low wooden bench outside her aunt's house in Ziguinchor, Aicha recounts the moment when her decision to migrate was met with resistance:

“When I spoke with my mother, she was against me leaving because, as a woman, she said, traveling was very risky. But I had already made up my mind, and that's how I left. Since nothing was holding me back, no husband, no job, I decided to embark on the journey. Even though I am a woman, some women possess the determination and resilience typically associated with men, taking full responsibility for themselves. My mother told me that a woman is always inferior to a man, which is why she tried to discourage me. But because I had the strength and resolve of a man, I committed to the journey.”

For Aicha, migrating to support her family even against her mother's will was a necessary and urgent responsibility, made even more pressing by her family's financial struggles. Her words illustrate that imagined mobility practice is no longer seen only as a male endeavour, as women like her stretch the gendered boundaries of who can migrate and for what purpose.

I met Ramatoulaye, a woman in her thirties, in the home of her late husband in a village in the Kolda region. She welcomes me into her gracious living room, furnished in a modern style and located on the second floor of a two-storey house that she inherited from her late husband, a man much older than her, whom she married after two unsuccessful attempts at reaching Europe. The house immediately stands out in the neighbourhood. While the surrounding homes are plain and unplastered, hers is covered in white and brown tiles that catch the sun, sparkling brightly, and it is fully enclosed by a fence. Her story, however, begins much earlier: her first attempt to migrate to Europe took place over a decade ago, when she was fourteen. As we sit together on the sofa, she

recalls her childhood, describing the everyday struggles of growing up in a polygamous household where resources were scarce and competition between co-wives was constant. “My father had two wives,” she explains, “my mother was the second wife, and I was her eldest child, her firstborn.” When she was only a teenager, Ramatoulaye’s father passed away, and the already fragile balance within the family was turned upside down. “The first wife had older children,” she says, “and one of the daughters from the first wife and my mother were almost the same age!” After her father’s death, the older siblings from the first wife allowed Ramatoulaye, her mother and her siblings to stay in the family home, but her position remained precarious, and the constant arguments, jealousy between the first wife and her mother, and growing inequalities between the children became increasingly unbearable. Because of this, Ramatoulaye decided to take matters in her own hands:

“My mother had seven children from that marriage, but I decided to migrate because I was the eldest. It is true that I am a woman, but even though my father had other male children with my mother, I was still the eldest. So the responsibility was on me.”

For Ramatoulaye, imagined mobility is shaped by her position as the eldest daughter of the second wife in a polygamous household. While gender norms did not position her as a primary provider, the early death of her father and the family’s economic precarity reconfigured her sense of obligation, making mobility appear not only as a strategy for survival but also as a socially meaningful avenue to support her widowed mother and siblings, challenging conventional expectations of women’s roles pushing against the patriarchal hierarchies of polygamy that had rendered her household vulnerable.

Fanta, a woman in her early twenties from a fishing village south of Dakar, did not face the same immediate family hardships as Aicha or Ramatoulaye. She comes from a monogamous family and her father is working as a fisherman. Yet, she sees embarking on a pirogue journey to Europe as a way to improve her family’s situation. In doing so, she takes on the role of breadwinner for herself, challenging traditional gender roles and the expectation that mobility to pursue success is only for men. “I am the eldest in the family and there are no jobs here, so I have to provide for myself and my family,” she claims proudly. “As the Wolof saying goes, a woman is capable, and so is a man, and everything a man can do, a woman can do as well.” Trespassing permissible societal boundaries of what a woman can do, Fanta made up her mind to take the pirogue some months prior to our meeting. She says she knew all too well

that many still see it as a “man’s thing”, but she disagrees strongly with the idea that success in life is different for men and women:

“*Tekki* is not about being a man or a woman! That’s why I took the pirogue. I wanted to work like all the men do, and like the brave women I know who have made it, women who built their families and their lives through this journey. And I want to be part of that too.”

While nearly all the men I spoke with described sacrifice for the family as central to their mobility practice as imagined, some women’s experiences revealed a more complex and layered understanding. This complexity comes through vividly in the story of Dieynaba, a woman in her twenties from a coastal town in the Thiès region. Orphaned by both parents while still a child, she married at a young age and soon became a mother of two. Not long after, she came to realise that her marriage was marked by abuse, a reality that eventually led to divorce. Now solely responsible for her children, Dieynaba’s mobility practice and sense of *tekki* are deeply shaped by her own experiences and those of her mother as women navigating a patriarchal society:

“When my mother was alive, I saw her constantly working hard to provide for her children [...] She never sat down, never rested. She worked outside as well [...] to pay for our schooling, to buy us clothes for the holidays, to ensure a better life for us, [she] worked tirelessly. That’s the image I have of her. It’s a shame she passed away without ever reaping the rewards of her hard labor. She died in poverty, like most Senegalese women. They sacrifice everything for their husbands and children, only to die without ever benefiting from the fruit of their labor. That’s the sad reality in Senegal. So, in a way, I wanted to change that.”

Unlike the life of self-abnegation and total sacrifice she saw in her mother, Dieynaba’s understanding of *tekki* carries a tension between familial duty and personal aspirations of autonomy, as she explains:

“If God decides that I make it to Europe and my circumstances change, I’m not saying I wouldn’t help my family. [...] Even if I don’t have much, I will give as much as I can. However, I won’t just give whenever someone asks for [...] I will think of myself first. It’s me who wakes up early every morning to go to work and earn money, and then I will think of my children.”

While she remains committed to supporting her family, she reimagines success by placing her own wellbeing at the centre. Her mobility practice as imagined does not reject family ties outright but marks a shift toward reclaiming *tekki* as a path to female empowerment, challenging the expectations of self-sacrifice imposed on those who make it in Europe and the broader pressures on women to give everything for their families.

Taken together, these stories shed light on mobility practice as imagined through the imperative of “making it” for the family. They show how mobility is closely tied to kinship responsibilities and gendered expectations, norms that individuals both navigate and challenge along gender lines. Mobility practice as imagined emerges as a morally charged project of survival, success, and social reproduction, while also creating space for new, more individual definitions of success, an aspect I develop more in the next section.

To Move, To Matter: *Tekki* and the Hunger for a Different Future

“Without money, you are nothing.”

“Without money, you are not someone to be respected.”

“Without money, not even your mother loves you.”

“Going to Europe would at least allow us to become someone, because here, we are nothing.”

These words resonated deeply in many conversations with young people who dreamed of leaving for Europe. In their narratives, mobility practice as imagined emerged as a transformative horizon through which people envisioned a better version of themselves, in which geographical mobility becomes, for them, the only viable path to social mobility. While fulfilling *tekki* as a familial duty remains central, *tekki* through mobility is also imagined as a pathway to individual self-fulfilment, social recognition and dignity, often closely linked to earning money. This understanding of *tekki* as tied to financial success must be seen against the backdrop of Senegal’s deteriorating socio-economic conditions, shaped by structural adjustment programs, the devaluation of the CFA franc (Mboj 1993), and the increasing monetarisation of social relations (Fouquet 2008) where to exist means to have. Money, in this context, functions less as an ultimate goal than as a proxy for social worth and dignity. It operates simultaneously as a vehicle for social mobility, where

departure to Europe symbolises ascent and success (Sall 2011) and as a means of escaping the “social death” associated with economic precarity in Senegal (Mbodji, 2008). Thus, the thirst for money that so often emerges in conversations about tekki should not be understood as a literal lack of economic means, though many families do face financial vulnerabilities, but rather as a hunger for a different kind of future, where money is seen less as material wealth in itself and more as a means of attaining that future.

“It’s like our life here in Senegal is just waiting to go to Europe,” reflects Ali, a man in his late twenties from Ziguinchor, as he gestures toward the bustling street scene around him. Along the roadside, countless vendors display second-hand clothes, and all sorts of goods from China: flip-flops, shoes, plastic toys, phone cases, soaps, jewellery, toys, and fabrics of every kind. In his neighbourhood, as in most Senegalese towns, these street vendors exemplify the small-scale, informal businesses that many of the young men rely on to make a living. “We live here, but we don’t really live here. It’s a constant state of waiting. The energy, the focus we should put into our work, we don’t give it. Our minds are only on Europe all the time,” Ali says, as we walk past the street vendors. At the time we met, Ali is newly married, and his wife just gave birth to his first daughter. Some years prior, he finished his studies in the field of hospitality but has since drifted between doing some *petit business*, like selling in the streets of Ziguinchor, and unemployment. We walk towards the cramped stall of a friend of his, tucked into one of the main squares of the town, where the scent of freshly brewed café Touba mingles with the smoke of cigarettes. As he speaks about his struggles to provide for his family, a heavy sense of “nothingness” weighs on him: “Imagine that you’re a boy and you’re doing nothing with your life. You’re just there. You do nothing, you are just sitting there in corners, making tea,” he says with bitter humor, referring to the long hours he and his friends spent at the stall earlier that day, as they do most days of the week:

“This is what young people do in Senegal. You just sit and do nothing the whole day. When the girls pass by, you’re behind them, sending them a kiss, telling them they look so cute like that, all nonsense. Every time one of your friends passes by, you ask, ‘Ah, give me 100 francs, please,’ or ‘Do you have cigarettes?’”

He blushes, the shame clear on his face as he disapproved of this way of living that translates into a profound feeling of social inadequacy: “That’s a nightmare, honestly. It’s embarrassing. Every time I think about that, travelling to Europe will always be a better option than this.”

For Ali, *tekki*, as a crucial part of mobility as an imagined practice, is deeply connected to the desire to break free from a pervasive sense of existential immobility experienced in Senegal. While earning money plays a role, *tekki* goes beyond material wealth; it is the social value and symbolic capital attached to money that shapes mobility practice as an imagined path out of social erasure and the endless feeling of waiting and emptiness. The belief that simply leaving for Europe, regardless of what one actually does there, can redeem oneself from the cycle of nothingness, is reinforced by seeing friends who have already made the journey. Ali and his group of friends have many childhood friends who have managed to reach Europe throughout the years. Although they all grew up together, the fact that some are now in Europe while they remain in Senegal has shifted the dynamics within their circle. Simply by being in Europe, Ali explains, their friends are seen as already being “someone,” regardless of their actual situation there. “Before our friends travelled to Europe, we would sit together as equals in the evenings, chatting and laughing, with no sense of superiority. But once one of us is in Europe, a hierarchy emerges,” he explains, raising and lowering his hand to visibly mark the difference. “Those of us who stay behind, for our dignity and honor, must make an effort to leave for Europe as well...” he adds.

These words show that imagined mobility is less about material gain and more a symbolic act of reclaiming dignity, status, and social recognition, as those left behind feel the pressure to demonstrate their own worth and potential. This is especially true for young men, whose sense of masculinity is tied not only to providing for the family, as seen above, but also to achieving social visibility, something believed to come easily through money.

If money lies at the centre of how people imagine mobility, its meaning differs by gender: for men, mobility as a way to gain money is often tied to one’s sense of manhood and need for social visibility; for women, the money they imagine to gain through mobility serves as a proxy for autonomy and independence. This becomes evident in how Dieynaba explains her vision of *tekki* for a woman, which contrasts sharply with the traditional role of a submissive wife and devoted mother, where success is merely defined by fulfilling familial duties. She explains that in Senegal, “a woman who succeeds is one who has found a man, who gets married, has children, and forms a family. [...] She has no right to work or to have personal growth, especially financially.” Conversely, for her, “to succeed as a woman means having financial independence. [...] Growing financially so that you don’t have to rely on a man.” Depending on a man, she claims, means having to “shrink

yourself”, to quiet your voice, to live under constant supervision, and to ask for permission for even the smallest things. When she divorced from her abusive husband, she recounts, the social stigma and daily harassment she faced as a divorced woman were almost as suffocating as her marriage. This reminded her that independence for women, comes with its own set of challenges:

“Here when men sense you are in need, they try to take advantage of you. Do you understand? As a woman, it’s not easy... If you do things, if you are an independent woman, like a woman who works, or a divorced woman, they look at you badly. When you are a divorced woman in Senegal, men look at you in a disrespectful way. [...] And once you are in need and go to a man whom you hope can help, he blackmails you. First, you have to sleep with him before he helps you.”

For Dieynaba, mobility is not imagined merely as a way to earn money for social status, as is often the case for men, but as a path to financial independence and the only viable means to secure freedom as a woman:

“As a woman, I don’t expect anything from the state or anyone else. I prefer to fend for myself, to thrive on my own terms, economically as well. That’s why I attempted migration. At my age, and considering how Senegalese society is, I don’t want to and I can’t depend on a man. Because I’ve dealt with them, I know the realities of Senegalese marriage, I’ve lived it, I’ve endured it. So I can no longer rely on a man [...] I want to depend on myself.”

The idea of mobility to gain financial independence and escape violent or dependent relationships was not limited to married or divorced women; it was also vividly present in the narratives of unmarried women, for whom migration symbolised a preemptive strategy to avoid the gendered constraints of marriage. This is the case of Fanta, who, having witnessed the emotional and physical toll of marriage on female relatives and friends, decided not to marry until she attained financial independence through moving to Europe:

“Every woman has her own choice, some choose to stay with a husband and base their lives around him. That’s not my choice. My choice is to first focus on building my life, my future, and then think about marriage and having children. So that once I have children, they will be in good condition. That’s what we young girls want, because once you’re married, your husband will only take care of the basic things, like

making sure you have food, but nothing more. That's why we want equality between men and women."

Fanta claims she embarked on a pirogue journey because she imagined it as the only way to achieve the financial independence that would allow her to resist what she perceives as the inevitable subordination tied to marriage, and to gain a voice in society. "As a woman, I want to thrive financially and be independent, to be among those who make decisions," she explains, underscoring how power and money are deeply entangled in her imagination: "In Senegal, those who have money are the ones who decide. So, if you have money, you can speak up, even if you are a woman."

While the testimonies above show how success through imagined mobility is closely tied to the symbolic value of money, *tekki* also goes beyond money and includes aspirations like pursuing a dream job and discovering the world. For Demba, his vision of mobility to Europe is shaped not only by the social pressure to provide for his family and the symbolic power attached to money, but also by a deeply personal ambition: his lifelong dream of becoming an artist. Around him, the floor is scattered with his colourful drawings and handcrafted furniture made from recycled materials. From an old speaker, a mix of Fela Kuti and reggae fills the small room, the rhythms mingling with the faint haze of smoke from the cigarette he puffs intermittently. He carefully arranges his creations as he explains:

"I saw my future as better in Europe than in Senegal. I wanted to be an artist. I told myself that maybe the opportunities were much more open there and that their approach to art was more advanced compared to African countries. Above all, I had the desire to discover new things and gain new knowledge. I knew that if I stayed in Dakar, I wouldn't progress with my art, so I thought, why not look for new horizons?"

Similarly, mobility practice as imagined is also seen as personal growth, realised in the aspiration to travel, to discover the world, and to lead a life that feels meaningful. This desire to explore beyond one's immediate environment is vividly expressed by Mamadou, a man in his forties from a village close to St. Louis who moved to the Canary Islands in 2006 by embarking on a pirogue:

"In the end, travelling was something I always wanted to do, not just to make money. From a young age, I knew the value of travelling. I was born here, in this tiny village, yet I was lucky enough to realise early on that the world isn't limited to the village. At eight years old, I went to

my father's house in Dakar, at 17 I went to Mauritania for the first time, and at 18, I went to Gambia. My vision was always broader."

As a teenager, Mamadou was an avid basketball fan and he used to spend hours watching games and dreaming of distant courts. Later on, he had a girlfriend from France. This, he recalls with a faint smile, only deepened his curiosity about exploring the world beyond Senegal, and pushed him to embark on a pirogue.

As Demba and Mamadou's reflections suggest, mobility as imagined must be understood not merely as economic advancement or social status, but also as a pathway toward personal fulfillment, capturing a broader spectrum of aspirations that goes beyond immediate needs.

The Imaginary of Europe

It is early Friday afternoon in Dakar, and I am sitting in a taxi on my way home after interviewing a representative from a local civil society organisation. As soon as the driver hears me speak, he immediately picks up on my accent. "Are you Italian?" he asks with enthusiasm, glancing at me. I nod. He smiles. "Ah, Italy! I have many friends there. I would love to go." Then, his smile fades, and he shakes his head, "but you see, getting a visa is too complicated." As he speaks, the taxi slows down in front of the Directorate of Immigration and Travel Documents. Outside, a long line of people stretches down the street. Some stand, others sit on small plastic chairs, a few lean against the walls. The driver chuckles and gestures toward the crowd with his chin. "Look there! You see? They are waiting for their passports. Everyone wants to leave. They think that Europe is El Dorado." I turn to him and ask: "El Dorado?" He smiles again: "Yes, El Dorado. They think that in Europe everything is perfect. Europe is paradise. The moment you make it there, you have succeeded. You have made it in life. You are like a king." His words linger in the air, blending with the hum of the city, the honking of cars, the calls of street vendors, the murmurs of those waiting in line. I glance once more at the queue before it disappears around the corner. One woman holds a piece of paper, showing it to a man next to her. Another scrolls through his phone to cheat the wait. I wonder how many of them will actually leave. And for those who actually do, will they find their El Dorado on the other side of the sea?

From that conversation with the taxi driver, I realised that many people I spoke with referred to Europe using that same expression: El Dorado. The term was used by both those who had attempted or aspired to go to Europe, as a way to explain why Europe represented their dream, and by Senegalese working in the migration industry, particularly in awareness-raising campaigns, who saw the desire to migrate as driven by a distorted, overly idealised image of Europe that needed to be deconstructed. If the previous section examined what drives people's desire to move, this section turns to why Europe, though by no means the only destination, remains a preferred horizon of aspiration for many Senegalese youth. The shared collective image of Europe as the place where previously explored notions of *tekki* can be realised, forms a second key dimension of mobility as an imagined practice. This imaginary is articulated in three main ways: first, through representations of Europe as a land of wealth circulated via popular media and storytelling; second, as a promised land for few, an idea fueled by restrictive visa regimes; and finally, through the tension between this idealised vision and more grounded, realistic visions of life there.

The myth of the El Dorado: Popular Culture and *Modou Modou*

The idea of Europe as an El Dorado, a mythical land of prosperity “where a privileged and relatively small community lives in eternal happiness and has access to immense wealth” (Calargé 2015:4), operates as a central element of mobility practice as imagined, and is central to understanding how imaginaries of Europe take shape in Senegal. To grasp the complexity of this imaginary, it is important to consider how both “Africa” and “Europe” have historically been constructed in opposition to one another through colonial and postcolonial discourses (Amselle and Diagne 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ngqulunga 2022). These constructions positioned Africa, and its black populations, as the symbolic antithesis of Europe and Europeans (Sarr 2016), while casting Europe as a normative, universal point of reference, a process that continues to inform how mobility, modernity, and prosperity are imagined. This dynamic contributes to the vision of Europe as a “promised land” and Africa as a space from which Europe must be protected (van Houtum 2010; De Genova 2018). Such representations are not only embedded in popular imaginaries but are also reflected in the political and discursive practices associated with border externalisation (Stachowitsch and Sachseder 2019; Pacciardi and Casaglia 2022; Pacciardi 2024; Prieto-Flores 2025). At the same time, Europe's self-representation often reinforces these divides. For instance, the 2022 statement by then-European Commission Vice-President Josep

Borrell, comparing Europe to a well-tended “garden” and the rest of the world to a “jungle”, captures well how Europe continues to project itself as a space of order, prosperity, and exceptionality (EEAS 2022).

These imaginaries have circulated among Senegalese youth for generations, reinforcing the belief that one must reach Europe to *tekki*. This vision is vividly reflected in the stories of Sira, Yayi, and Mbaye, who, though shaped by different generational contexts, all recall how their youthful desire to move to Europe was fueled by idealised images of it as a land of opportunities. When I meet her at her home in Ziguinchor, Sira is in her early thirties, married, and raising her first child. Sitting in the shaded courtyard outside her house, built with the remittances of her husband who lived in Europe, she recalls how, in 2015, she too set out to reach El Dorado:

“All the young people of my generation dreamed of going. We all shared the same dream, to leave. But we would tell ourselves, it’s only a dream. No one wants to have nothing in life. And over there in Europe, they say that if you make it, you’ll succeed, you’ll get everything you want. As if it were some kind of *paradise*!”

Sira’s words echo those of Yayi, a man in his late fifties, whom I meet in a small room at a local clinic in the Tambacounda region. His wife has just given birth to their first son, and he smiles with pride and joy. Yayi has spent nearly two decades outside Senegal. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to reach Europe in the 1990s, he eventually settled in Central Africa. “You know, when I left, all I kept hearing was ‘Europe, Europe, Europe.’ I had heard that Europe was better than Africa.” He did not know much about Europe at the time, he says, but the way people were talking about it, made him want to go there at all costs. “Sometimes, Europe is just a dream, a dream for young people. It’s their El Dorado,” he sighs. Although he never reached Europe, the idea of it continues to hold a kind of mythical power for him. He smiles softly as he confesses that he hopes one day his son would succeed where he could not.

Mbaye, a young man in his twenties from Ziguinchor, attempted to reach Europe in 2019. After returning without success, he opened a small printing shop, which seems to be doing reasonably well. As we talk, he mentions the variety of clients who come in, and a few arrive while we are speaking, interrupting our conversation to pick up printed T-shirts or documents. Proudly, he shows me the freshly painted sign he had just finished for a friend’s hairdressing shop in the neighborhood, explaining that the money he earned allowed him to buy a small TV for his mother. Yet, despite these achievements,

his thoughts remain fixated on Europe, the space that continues to occupy his ambitions. Like many others of his generation, his imagination is deeply shaped by enduring dichotomies between Europe and Africa, understood primarily in opposition:

“Africa is misery, Africa is a desert, that’s why we all flee, trying to reach paradise in Europe, because for us, Europe is a paradise, the El Dorado. You know, when you are in Africa, Europe is your point of reference. You look to Europe because it is a developed place. So, the idea of going to Europe is always there in our minds.”

Mbaye recalls how, before attempting his journey, he and a close friend would spend hours on Youtube watching videos about life in Europe, captivated by what appeared to them as a world of opportunity and ease: “Before we left, we would watch videos about Europe all the time and everything that’s happening there, we would love to see how Europe is, how people live there!”

If Yayi and Sira’s stories reveal mobility practice as imagined through a largely mythical vision of Europe as a land of opportunity, often idealised despite limited direct experience, Mbaye’s account brings into focus how this imaginary is also deeply shaped by contrasting Europe with the lived realities of life in Senegal. For Mbaye, and many like him, the idea of Europe is not formed solely from dreams but is continually negotiated through everyday encounters with popular culture. From a young age, many Senegalese are immersed in images produced largely in Europe (especially France) and North America (especially Canada): from movies and TV advertisements to visuals in local shops and, increasingly, social media. These portrayals, Mbaye explains, often depict European life as glamorous and effortless, smiling faces, happy families, spacious homes, and shiny cars. “Already at a first glance,” he says “you can tell that life in Europe is nothing like life in Africa!”

Beyond popular culture and social media images, it is perhaps the visible success of returnees from Europe, the *modou modou*, a Wolof term for emigrants, that most powerfully reinforce the imaginary of Europe as a land of opportunity. Notably, the term *modou modou* originally referred to seasonal labourers working in the peanut fields during the colonial era, and it was only in the 1990s that its meaning shifted to describe those who migrate to Europe (Willems 2008), revealing a striking continuity between imaginaries of *tekki* during colonial forms of labour mobility and postcolonial migration. Babacar, a young man in his early twenties from a village in the Tambacounda region, is one among many who dreams of reaching Europe, inspired by the success

stories of the *modou modou* in his neighbourhood. He already attempted the journey once by pirogue but was unsuccessful. As we walk through his modest village, he points out well-built houses, a small clinic, and a school along the way. He explains that much of what he describes as “the village’s development” is thanks to those who have gone to Europe, whose remittances have made a real difference. With a mix of envy and surprise he adds that, without their help, and the support of *toubabi*, white Europeans, the village would be nothing. “You see how underdeveloped our village is” he says gesturing at the houses around us, most of them still unfinished:

“Even though I do have a job here and I can manage, there was a moment when I said to myself, no, if everyone stays like this, there won’t be much development here. I know that all the development here comes from the *modou modou*. Even the schools you see, the hospital, everything here was built either by Senegalese migrants or Europeans. As a witness, I thought, why not? I will try too, take my chance, to see if I can change the situation. In fact, that’s what pushed me to leave.”

In Babacar’s mind, Europe is a source of development and progress. As he gestured towards the newly painted houses, sometimes with lavish decorative tiles, he mentions how they belong to this or that other person from the village who has emigrated to Spain, Italy, or France. In his view, this contrasts the wealth accumulated by those living abroad with the unfinished, unpainted houses in the village, which often lack windows and doors. This phenomenon, particularly evident in Senegal (Beauchemin, Lessault, Sakho 2013), as in many other African countries, serves as a visible reminder of the disparity between the *modou modou* and those who remain, fuelling imagination of what life in Europe could be.

The belief that moving to Europe is a safe path to *tekki* is also reinforced by the way the *modou modou* who come back for the holidays are often celebrated, displaying a lifestyle considered luxurious, signaling their social mobility and success. Moussa, a man in his late thirties, lives in a tiny village near the border with Mali. His connection to Europe has long been shaped by family ties as one of his uncles moved to France in the 1980s, and his cousins, born and raised there, return periodically to the village. Their presence is felt not only through stories of life abroad, and pictures they share on social media, but also through the material traces of their success in Europe: the family house where Moussa lives was built almost entirely with their remittances. When I visit Moussa at his home, the atmosphere is vibrant and celebratory. His uncle and his cousin’s wife, both Senegalese living in France, have just returned for

the holidays with large suitcases packed with gifts for everyone. To mark their return, a small celebration has been organised in the courtyard. The smell of hot oil drifts through the air as women gather around large metal pots, frying beignets, golden, crisp dough balls that disappear as quickly as they are made. Neighbours and acquaintances from across the village drop by one after another to greet them, as children run between plastic chairs chasing each other with sticky fingers. In villages like Moussa's, the return of a family member from Europe, even for a short visit, is always a special occasion. As we sit under one of the trees in the front yard enjoying the party, Moussa seems deep in thought. "You see why I always think about leaving? I want to join my family over there," he says, his gaze lingering on his uncle as he chats with some guests telling them anecdotes about his life in France as an immigrant back in the 1980s. Behind him, his suitcase lies half open, with brand new clothes and perfumes, while some of the women in the family are already trying things on. "Here in Senegal, those who haven't traveled but have family in Europe already have a certain idea of what life there is like. When you compare your life here to what it could be in Europe..." Moussa adds, his eyes distant, alluding to the fact that opportunities and social recognition seem more attainable there, even if the journey is risky. "For us, they are the *modou modou*, the immigrants, look at what they've done! If you see beautiful buildings, the solid houses, those were built by them," he gestures broadly toward the dusty streets beyond the house, so that I could see the difference between the buildings, then adds:

"They are the real force behind development. They do what the state doesn't. Roads, water access, drilling wells, these things are difficult to build, and the government struggles to provide them. The rest, all of it, comes from them. If you don't have someone in Europe, life here is really tough. You can survive, but it's truly difficult!"

The things that people that live in Europe build back in the villages and the gifts that they bring back fuel an idea of mobility where Europe symbolises wealth, status, recognition, and social visibility, which, as explored in the previous section, are essential parts of *tekki*.

Visa Restrictions Fueling the Desire for El Dorado

"These mass visa rejections are what push young people to resort to illegal migration," Mbaye claims with conviction towards the end of our conversation, as he turns against what he sees as unjust policies:

“It sparks our curiosity and prompts us to ask: Why do they reject us? What makes Europe so special? Why don’t they want us to come? Is it because life there is a paradise? So, we think that whether it’s life or death, we will find a way in, nothing will stop us from reaching Europe. [...] I am sure that if young people had the chance to travel legally, work for a season, see what’s happening in Europe, earn their living, and come back, they would never want to stay there. But it’s curiosity, driven by this rejection, by Europe’s closure [that makes us want to leave].”

Within the framework of mobility as imagined practice, the imaginary of Europe as a promised land becomes structured not just by popular culture and the *modou modou*, but also by stories of visa refusals and the realisation of being denied entry, even when trying to do so legally. Mbaye’s words capture the harsh reality that for people like him, just like Moussa, Babacar, Yayi, Sira, and almost everyone I met, Europe represents a world they can only access through TV, social media, books, or the accounts of others. When they try to turn this imagined Europe into a lived experience, their visa applications are systematically denied, leaving them confined to dreams they are not allowed to realise. For Mbaye, being constantly rejected makes the idea of Europe even stronger and more powerful. Because Europe feels so out of reach, it becomes more appealing and mythical. Within the framework of mobility practice as imagined, visa rejections make the idea of Europe grow even stronger in people’s minds, driving their desire to move there, not only despite its impossibility, but precisely because of it.

Aliou, a university student in his twenties from St. Louis and the son of a *modou modou*, who has never travelled to Europe himself, expresses how visa restrictions do not dampen people’s desire for Europe, but rather intensify it. Although he has always held a realistic image of Europe thanks to the stories of his father, he explains that the sheer number of visa refusals, almost half of all applicants from Senegal (Taddele Maru 2024), creates a deep sense of humiliation that compels people to want to go at all costs:

“If the relationships between Africa and Europe were more fluid and we could travel freely, we would no longer risk crossing the sea, [...] But the refusal of a visa costs a lot, not only financially, but also psychologically and emotionally.”

Although he himself has never applied for a visa, many of his friends has, and they were deeply scarred by the rejection, he explains:

“The first fear of an African is not getting the visa for Europe, and that pushes us to take risks, like crossing the sea. Emotionally as well, when you realise that you cannot obtain that visa, you will no longer see Europe the same way. You will feel so vexed that you’ll be willing to do anything to go there. You will say ‘No, I will redeem myself’, even if it means crossing the sea, because they refused you the visa.”

Aliou’s reflections reveal how the impossibility of moving to Europe becomes entangled with emotions of frustration, wounded pride, and an urgent need to reclaim one’s dignity through movement. In this context, mobility is not just about reaching a destination but about asserting a form of recognition in the face of exclusion. As legal entry is systematically denied, the imagined practice of mobility becomes infused with both longing and defiance. Europe, precisely because it is inaccessible, emerges as an even more powerful and emotionally charged horizon of desire. This is even more evident in the words of Mamadou, who left northern Senegal and reached Spain in 2006, as he describes his journey across the sea as a response to the systematic denial of legal entry:

“I wanted to travel in a dignified way and I applied for a visa to go to France twice. Both times, I was denied. I did not make the decision to take a pirogue, but the circumstances pushed me to take the pirogue. If, for example, I had never tried to get a visa, or never tried to go to the consulate, or look for documentation, or get a passport, and then suddenly woke up one day and took a pirogue, at least they could say that it was my decision. But no. I tried, I tried again, I did everything I could, and they didn’t give it to me. You know, I could have looked at myself and said ‘Ay, how poor I am for taking a pirogue.’ But no, what I say is that when Europe put millions of euros to control the border, when they deployed the Guardia Civil, when they sent the military to stop us, when they did everything to stop migration, they couldn’t stop me. I got there!”

Here, Europe’s fortified borders and restrictive visa regimes do not simply discourage movement, they intensify the imagined value of reaching Europe. The more restrictions are imposed, the more mobility through the imaginary of Europe becomes an obsession that people will pursue at all costs. This is evident in the conversation with three young fishermen Saliou, Ndongo, and Lamine as they recall their multiple attempts at reaching Europe.

Saliou: “We will try to enter until we make it. We have all tried, each in our own way. It didn’t work. It’s a *virus* that’s here. It’s contagious too. It’s even worse than a virus!”

Lamine: “In my mind, I’m always thinking about Europe. Once you taste migration, that’s it. Everything you think about is succeeding, and you’ll keep trying again and again until you succeed. Once you try it once, it becomes chronic. Your whole life will focus on that. It’s like a *chronic illness*. It could be the disease of Europe. It can only be cured if you succeed.”

Saliou, Ndong and Lamine describe a suffocating sense of being trapped, where no thought seemed possible except departure. Their words reveal how the imagined practice of mobility can, over time, shift into a totalising orientation, “a virus”, or “a chronic illness”. The more restrictions are imposed, the more Europe morphs into an obsession, a symbolic anchor around which entire lives are structured. It is no longer merely a place to reach, but a state of becoming. This affective grip of Europe’s imaginary, intensified by its inaccessibility captures people’s imagination, generates longing, frustration, and even obsession, revealing how border regimes do not simply act on bodies in motion, but also profoundly shape how people imagine movement before it happens, and how this imagination shape their lives in waiting.

Not Everything in El Dorado is Gold, but It’s Still Golden

While the image of Europe as an El Dorado undeniably shapes the collective imaginary in Senegal, this does not imply a naive belief in a flawless life abroad. On the contrary, there is a general awareness of the struggles, precarity, and marginalisation that being a migrant in Europe can entail. What emerges is a tension between disillusionment and longing: a recognition that El Dorado is a myth, and yet a persistent hope that, even if it is not all gold, it still shines brighter than the everyday reality in Senegal. This tension is visible in the story of Soda, a young unmarried woman in her early twenties from a village in the Tambacounda region. Like many from her community, she has attempted to reach Europe through North Africa. After spending several months in Morocco working as a maid and saving money for the next leg of the journey, she ultimately decided to return to Senegal. Her choice was shaped not by logistical failure but by a deeper discomfort with the racialised violence she encountered: “I didn’t like how black people are treated over there,” she tells me plainly. Soda’s journey was never propelled by a naive belief in Europe as

a promised land, but was informed by a rather realistic assessment of life abroad:

“I know that going to Europe and being happy are two different things. Some of my friends have been there for two to three years, and they cannot work, even though they went there to have a better life. And up to now, they have not yet achieved that. From what they tell me they are not happy at all about Europe, yet I wanted to go see for myself.”

Her decision to leave is shaped by a measured hope that life elsewhere might still offer more than what she could expect at home, without buying into the exaggerated promises so often circulated among young people:

“I know that people say everything is perfect in Europe, but I know that is nonsense, it is a lie. I don’t listen to those things. But I nevertheless made my choice to go, as life is a matter of personal decisions.”

Soda’s words cut through the notion that the imaginary of Europe rests on deception or naivety. Many people I met, like her, are generally aware of the contradictions and challenges, still they go. This sober hope is echoed by Bocar, whose best friend lives in Spain. He speaks with striking clarity about the duality of Europe, not as a paradise, but as a place where hardship might still lead to better opportunities:

“My friend in Europe tells me the truth. He tells me that life there is really hard, actually very hard, but still better than here. He works in the fields, and it’s very, very tough. I know that Europe is not the El Dorado people imagine, where you go and become rich and live a perfect life and all of that. Still, it’s better than Senegal because, even though he works in the fields, what he’s been able to earn there is something he could never earn in Senegal doing the same job.”

These testimonies reveal that the myth of Europe as an El Dorado exists alongside more grounded and nuanced understandings of life abroad. For many like Soda and Bocar, Europe does not represent perfection, it represents possibility. Even when the dream is cracked and contested, it continues to structure mobility aspirations in spite of its imperfection, because of the perceived persistent lack of better alternatives at home. The imagined practice of mobility thus becomes a practice of negotiation, between myth and reality, between disillusionment and longing, and between the lived awareness of

hardships in Senegal and the enduring pursuit of hope for a better life in Europe.

While some expectations may be idealised, most people generally have a fairly grounded understanding of life in Europe. Their imaginaries often centred on concrete aspects of social welfare and human rights they perceive as lacking in their own context, such as fair employment, equal access to healthcare, and workers' rights. It is this perception of Europe as a place where dignity and labour are more valued, rather than literally as a land of gold, that shapes their will to move. Resting on the worn wooden bench of an empty stall in the market after our walk through the village, Babacar speaks with quiet resignation about his grim job prospects in Senegal. He is a painter with several years of experience, but things don't look promising. Most of his clients, mostly acquaintances from the village, demand very low prices, and he rarely has the heart to refuse. Often, he waits months before anyone pays him. Moreover, there are no holidays or sick days; he has to work whenever he finds a job, no matter the conditions, because he cannot afford to say no. Many of his friends from the village have left for Europe and told him that he could have a future in the building construction over there.

“My friends in Europe work hard. Here, we work a lot too, but we get nothing. You work for nothing at all. Yes, you work, but you have no reward. In Europe, even if you don't have wealth, at least you know that work is better paid. Here, if you work for someone and you get sick, it's up to you to take care of yourself. If you don't work, you don't get paid. If you're sick, you stay home, and for every day you stay home, you earn nothing. But in Europe, even if you don't have money, you can still have a decent life. Doctors will see you, and you'll receive medical care. In Europe, the state takes care of people. Here, the state takes care of no one except politicians.”

While much of this imaginary of Europe as a land of social rights is shared by both men and women, important gendered differences emerge, particularly in how some women imagine Europe not only as a place of better professional opportunities, but as a space of greater personal freedom, respect, and gender equality. These imaginaries are not rooted in abstract ideals, but in the everyday realities of power inequalities that many women experience in Senegal, where patriarchy is deeply embedded in family relations, social expectations and norms. This is articulated with striking clarity by Dieynaba, who, as we've seen earlier, speaks from personal experience as a divorced

woman who first endured the violence of her marriage and then navigated the heavy stigma that comes with divorce:

“Europeans respect human rights, and even more, they respect women. They practice equality between men and women. [...] It’s different from Senegal. In Senegal, in a family, it seems like a woman has no say. She must conform to the decisions of men and remain silent. [...] I like the European mentality because in European society, when a woman has a child, the child can carry both the mother’s and the father’s surnames. But here, that’s not the case. The woman bears the child for nine months, but it is the father’s name that is passed down. For me, that’s a bit unfair. It’s good that European society is more just toward women than African society. Here, society is designed for men, not for women. Women are not always comfortable in this society because it is made for men. This shows how unfair Senegalese society is to women. [...] In European society, from what I have seen and read, they try to make things fairer, even if not 100%”.

For women like Dieynaba, mobility practice as imagined is not simply a desire to reach a mythical El Dorado, but it holds the promise of escaping patriarchal constraints and being recognised as a full person with dignity. These imaginaries are not delusions, but political aspirations and expressions of critique against the injustices she faces at home grounded in a fairly realistic knowledge of Europe.

The Imaginary of Routes

This final section analyses one last component of mobility practice as imagined, focusing on how border externalisation policies shape and limit the very ways individuals conceive of their mobility and possible trajectories. By foreclosing safe and legal mobility options, these policies do more than block physical movement, they structure imagination itself, pushing people to envision alternative ways. The choice of how to move is not uniform but deeply shaped by social imaginaries of which routes are considered easier, quicker, safer, or more fit according to one’s own circumstance. These imaginaries are formed within specific socio-cultural contexts and family circles, through conversations, stories, and the lived experiences of others. Mental geographies are created through interactions with peers who have

migrated, influencing not only the desire to move, as seen earlier, but also the envisioned route. While other factors such as financial resources and chance also influence these decisions, this section zooms in on the dimension of imagination, highlighting how the desire to move and the strategies for doing so are co-produced within collective imaginaries. While previous sections analysed mobility practice as imagined both in terms of how mobility is envisioned as a path to *tekki*, and how Europe is imagined as the place where such success can be achieved, this final section explores how mobility is anticipated and navigated at the level of imagination in its most practical and material aspects, particularly in the choice of routes and modes of movement.

Visa Imaginaries and the Making of Alternative Mobilities

One evening in Mbour, after sharing grilled meat at a local street food restaurant, I met Mounia, a woman in her thirties originally from Dakar who was living in North Africa at the time and came back to visit her family. Connected through mutual acquaintances, she almost immediately asked me if I could help her book a visa appointment for Spain, scheduled for the next day at midnight. She appears visibly tense, placing all her hopes on me, as if assuming that I somehow know better than she does and that, through me, her chances of success might improve. Visa appointments, she explains, are not handled directly by the Spanish embassy but outsourced to private intermediary firms, such as VFS Global for France and Italy, BLS Services International Ltd. for Spain, and TLS Contact for Belgium. These companies manage appointment scheduling and initial document collection before forwarding applications to embassies, acting as a buffer between applicants and consular authorities. Rather than simplifying the process, Mounia laments the long waiting times, non-refundable fees even if visas are denied, and a pervasive lack of transparency. She has repeatedly tried to secure an appointment herself, only to be met with freezing websites and rapidly disappearing time slots. This problem, she clarifies, affects not only those seeking new lives in Europe, but also Senegalese researchers, businesspeople, NGO workers, and family members of those already abroad. For instance, a Senegalese friend of hers, married to a Spanish citizen and pregnant with their first child, struggled for over a year to obtain a visa. When she finally secured an appointment, her visa was refused on the grounds that her familial ties were “not strong enough”, despite marriage and pregnancy. This story mirrors the experience of Amina, another woman in her late twenties I met through mutual acquaintances, who had been married to an Italian citizen for a year at the time

we met but, like Mounia's friend, struggled for months to secure a visa appointment. Despite her husband repeatedly emailing and calling the embassy, she has faced the same barriers. "Getting a visa in Senegal is harder than having ten children in one pregnancy," Mounia laughs.

The perception that getting a visa is impossible not only fuels the idea of Europe as a paradise, as discussed earlier, evoking feelings of hope and redemption through border crossing, but also instills a widespread belief that, if obtaining a visa is unattainable, then seeking alternative routes becomes the only viable option. This belief is grounded in countless lived experiences and circulating stories of repeated visa denials and scams, as the sealing off of borders creates loopholes exploited by a vast network of intermediaries who sell visa appointments for hundreds of euros (an amount that far exceeds the average Senegalese monthly salary of around 130€), which often turn out to be fraudulent. Such circulating stories of visa denial and deception are central to shaping a collective imaginary that views visas as nearly impossible to obtain, ultimately compelling many to imagine and pursue alternative, often unauthorised, routes as their only means of mobility. Indeed, this imaginary corresponds to reality: visa policies are a primary instrument of border externalisation (c.f. Bigo & Guild, 2005; Laube, 2019). Since the 1990s, obtaining a visa for Europe from West Africa has become increasingly difficult, marking what can be considered a first colonial encounter between mobile populations and border policies. West Africa's visa rejection rate is nearly six times higher than the EU average (Frontex 2015), with Senegal among the countries experiencing nearly half of all applications systematically denied (Taddele Maru 2024). These figures reflect only those who manage to apply, excluding many who are effectively barred by structural and bureaucratic obstacles, stringent requirements, and prohibitive costs.

Alpha is a man in his thirties from a village in the Kaffrine region. By the time we meet, he has already attempted twice to reach Europe, as the income he earns from harvesting and selling peanuts grown in his family's field is far from sufficient to support himself and his family. Before resorting to the backdoor route, he explains, he tried to apply for a visa in hopes of traveling legally but fell victim to a scam. At the time, he was in Mbour working as a carter between the shores and the city centre. There, he met a Senegalese man who claimed to be able to assist people who want to travel to Spain through legal means. The man allegedly had an office and a reputation for "doing business with white people." He seemed legitimate and came with good reputation, so Alpha trusted him and handed over his passport and all necessary

documents. Weeks later, the man called to inform him that his visa had finally been approved, but advised him to consult a marabout, a Senegalese Islamic religious leader often sought out for guidance on important matters. The marabout, however, told Alpha that it was not safe for him to travel at that time, so he decided not to go. When he tried to call the man who handled his visa application, he had vanished. Needless to say, he never got his money back. Such fraudulent schemes are increasingly common and often circulate through social media and messaging apps. Many also reported being contacted by phone by supposed travel agents who offered to help them obtain a visa in exchange for money. Stories like these are all too common and reveal how the desire and hope for Europe render people vulnerable to exploitation. At the same time, they are central to shaping collective imaginaries in which the visa process is seen not just as inaccessible, but as a scam-ridden and arbitrary path best avoided altogether. This discourages many from even attempting to apply for a visa. Almost everyone I spoke with shared the view that applying is overly complicated, expensive, and ultimately a waste of time, money, and energy. This dynamic is vividly illustrated in the story of Boulaye, a young man in his early twenties. Originally from Casamance, I first met him in Dakar, where he was struggling to find stable work in the communications sector. Unable to secure employment, he has been actively planning his migration to Europe for some time:

“Well, I was supposed to apply for a visa. I even had my passport. After I got my passport, I started gathering information on how the visa process works. But I saw that it was too complicated, and it was not clear in my mind. I saw people who had followed the whole process but in the end, they did not get it. They wasted their time and money for nothing. So, I decided that, since it is like this, I am stopping with the visa. I thought, now, I’m going to take the pirogue. That’s what is in my head. Because there comes a point where I don’t really have a choice, do I? I think this is the only solution to get to Europe.”

The widespread imaginary that visas to Europe are virtually impossible to obtain plays a powerful role in shaping people’s mobility. When the legal route is perceived as blocked by a combination of bureaucracy, arbitrary rejection and scams, alternative routes begin to appear not just as a last resort but as the only rational option.

“The Sea Does Not Scare Us”: the Imaginary of Atlantic Mobility

One afternoon, I sit with Saliou, Ndongo, and Lamine on the edge of the beach where the waves hit the sand. Around us, the fishing nets are drying in the sun, and the air smells of salt and fish. The conversation moves between laughter and gravity, memory and hope as they mend fishing nets scattered across our feet. They speak of reaching Europe not from a place of total despair, but from within the rhythms of their lives of fishermen already shaped by maritime mobility within Senegal, by regional fishing campaigns, and by generations of maritime knowledge. Their stories reflect what I understand as the last instance of mobility as an imagined practice, a form of envisioning the best route rooted in lived experience and shared stories of movement. Among Senegalese coastal communities, the pirogue journey across the Atlantic stands out as one of the most vividly imagined and frequently discussed routes to reach Europe. Historically, the first to reach the Canary Islands were, in fact, fishermen who used their familiarity with the sea to redirect their journey toward Europe (Carrera 2007). While most communities along the Senegalese coast are Lebou, an ethnic group historically tied to fishing and coastal life, they have not traditionally engaged in long-distance migration, unlike other groups such as the Soninké of the Senegal River valley, who relied on circular migration, or Wolof traders (Andersson 2014). Yet, as pirogue journeys are organised and directed by fishermen, many of them Lebou, their intimate relationship with the sea gives them detailed knowledge of maritime routes and conditions.

It is safe to say that not everyone who embarks on a pirogue is intimately familiar with the sea, yet many are, or travel alongside friends or acquaintances who are. This shared maritime knowledge makes the Atlantic backdoor far less unfamiliar to local coastal communities than it might seem to outsiders. Although the route is indeed dangerous and has claimed many lives, the dominant narratives circulating in both Europe and Senegal that often portray it as inherently suicidal partially obscure the situated knowledge and everyday realities of those who live by and with the sea. For fishermen especially, this kind of journey is not seen as a reckless leap into the unknown, but as a continuation of the skills and routines they have developed over a lifetime at sea, where risk is not denied, but managed. For Saliou, Ndongo, and Lamine, like many others I spoke with along the Senegalese coast, the journey to Europe by pirogue draws on their experience of spending extended periods at sea and traveling long distances for fishing. “I am a fisherman, and most of us are fishermen. For us, the sea isn’t a problem,” Saliou tells me, as if stating

something obvious. He remembers going to sea with his father since childhood, learning from him the secrets of navigation and the art of fishing:

“If I see an opportunity to take the sea to go to Europe, I will. I go fishing every day. I wake up at 5 in the morning to head out to sea. Since I was 8, I used to go fishing with my father. As I grew up, I also started doing fishing campaigns in Gambia, where we would stay out for days. So, the sea does not scare me.”

Although he has never navigated until the Canary Islands, he speaks with pride as he describes spending up to fifteen days at sea. For him, Saliou says candidly, the idea of staying at sea for a week, the average duration of a journey to the Canary Islands, is not intimidating at all. His friends share the same intimacy with the ocean and echoes his perspective. Half-jokingly, half-serious, Lamine jumps into the conversation, adding that he would either make it to Europe or die in the attempt. This is a phrase I heard repeatedly from him and many others, but that day it lingered, unsettling me enough that I asked if he *truly* understood that he was *literally* risking his life. My questioning of his knowledge of the risks unsettled him:

“We all know very well the risks. We are fully aware of them. We see deaths every day... You Europeans think we are unaware, that we don’t know the risks, but we know them very well. Sometimes we sit at night and talk with a friend, and the next day we hear he has taken the pirogue, and the day after, we hear he has died in the sea. We live with that every day, and still it cannot stop us. Europeans have never taken a pirogue, but they think we don’t know. [...] They think we fear the risks in the sea, but we fear the risks of life in Senegal more...”

While fishermen like them know the dangers of the crossing the Atlantic, yet decide to do so nevertheless in the absence of viable alternatives, media and political discourse both in Senegal and in Europe frame this choice as a suicidal gamble, casting migrants as “kamikaze” and reckless risk-takers (Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012). This portrayal is reinforced by the popularized Wolof motto *Barsa wala Barsakh*, reportedly coined by Senegalese people themselves, and then translated with “Barcelona or death,” which has come to symbolize this type of migration, reinforcing a narrative that portrays West African mobility as irrational and suicidal (Prieto-Flores, 2025), all while overlooking the fishermen’s embodied knowledge and calculated decisions. “We are not afraid of dying. In fact, we are happy when we are in the pirogue,”

Ndongo explains, trying to convey that death is not what dominate people's mind as they embark on the journey:

"I tried three times. If you knew for sure that the moment you put the pirogue in the water you were going to die, no one would go, of course! But at that moment, we are so confident that no one will die and that we will make it. Hope is stronger than fear. As we say here, 'the one who is afraid will never cross to the other shore, they will not succeed in life.'"

At first glance, Ndongo's words might seem to reinforce the trope of reckless young black men risking their lives at sea. Yet his testimony reveals a far more nuanced thinking. Once aboard the pirogue, it is not death that occupies passengers' minds, but a strong focus on the objective: reaching Europe. Far from a suicidal impulse, this journey by pirogue emerges as a calculated act of risk-taking and a strategic response to the impossibility to travel otherwise. For most people undertaking a sea journey, "risk acceptability is mediated by life opportunities" (Hernández-Carretero & Carling 2012:413), highlighting that deciding to embark on such journeys is a deliberate act shaped by aspirations, constraints, and strategic assessments of opportunity and danger.

This sense of intentionality is also reflected in the widespread practice of consulting marabouts before embarking on the journey to Europe. Ndongo, Lamine, and Saliou tell me that if the marabout says that "the way is not clear," people would abandon the journey entirely. This ritual consultation highlights the careful consideration involved, revealing that people's choice to take the sea is guided by belief, reflection, and spiritual grounding. "I say that it is better to die in the sea than to die here, knowing that it is my courage to change things that pushed me to die," adds Lamine towards the end of the conversation, reinforcing what Ndongo had just said. "Whether I like it or not, I will die one day. Who controls death? Only God controls death. If my time has come, there is nothing I can do about it."

Rather than centring death in their imagination, Lamine and Ndongo view the journey through a spiritual lens, placing their fate in God's hands. The pirogue journey is therefore not imagined as escape or suicide, but as a grounded response to immobility that draws on embodied experience of the sea, community knowledge, and spiritual guidance. As such, it reflects mobility as an imagined practice as a way of making movement both thinkable and actionable through faith and lived familiarity with the ocean.

“I Wanted to Do the Same”: Social Ties and Moral Logics of Routes

It is an exceptionally warm day when I arrive in a remote village right in the heart of the Tambacounda region. The village lies quite far from the nearest town, and is marked by its tiny circular houses built with straw and earth, blending into the dusty landscape of red sand and baobabs. Samba, a man in his forties, greets me with a strong handshake and says he is the president of the local association of returnees. He wears a long blue scarf around his head to protect himself from the hot sun and the sand in the wind. Only his eyes are visible. His look is serious but also kind. He walks slowly with me through the small settlement where his big family lives. They are primarily farmers, but the increasing unpredictability of the rainy seasons have made growing crops much harder. The village lacks direct access to water, and every day they must travel some 20 kilometres by *charette*, a wooden cart pulled by a donkey, to fetch water from the nearest city. Samba's voice carries visible frustration as he laments how the Senegalese state seems to have forgotten them. This neglect, he says, is why nearly everyone in his family has attempted to migrate to Europe over the years, though none succeeded. Each attempt followed the same paths taken before, as if the route itself had been passed down, alongside the desire to leave. While geography and practical factors, such as proximity to the coasts and familiarity with the sea, influence people's ideas about the best routes to take, the imagination of which path to follow is also deeply shaped by social networks. Stories that circulate within families and communities create mental geographies that shape how people imagine mobility practice.

Some members of Samba's family were among the first pioneers to try the Atlantic route to the Canary Islands. In the early 2000s, Samba's older brother attempted to cross from Mauritania but tragically lost his life during the journey. As Samba recalls, these were the early days of sea migration to Europe, when people in the village began organising collective departures, guided by the stories they had heard from others who had gone before them. In 2006, Samba himself followed the same route to Europe. He managed to arrive, but was returned shortly after. “At the time, there was the pirogue route and the Sahara route, which is more direct, through Mali, Algeria, and then towards Morocco or Libya. But I imagined that route to be very difficult,” he says, explaining that his choice was largely based on the stories he heard from other people who discouraged him to take the Sahara:

“It's tough over there, especially in Libya; it is not a good place. Some people I knew passed through Algeria, but in the end, they did not make

it, so I decided to go through Mauritania. It's quicker. Mauritania is much closer, and the people there are more religious than in the North, more so than the Arabs, so I preferred to go to Mauritania."

Samba's choice to migrate via Mauritania reflects how his mental geography, shaped by racialised and religious imaginaries of North Africa as dangerous and less ethical, intersects with practical considerations of proximity and perceived safety in shaping his mobility practice. Shortly after Samba was returned, his younger brother Hamady, along with a cousin, took the same route, only to be also returned shortly after. Seeing that the Atlantic route did not work, the youngest brother, Usman, sought information from others in the village and left in 2012, aiming to reach Libya or Morocco to cross into Europe. However, he never made it that far; he stopped in Algeria, ran out of money, and could no longer bear the hardships of the journey. Eventually, he decided to return. In 2016, Usman's older son, Pathé, followed in his father's footsteps. After making several unsuccessful attempts from Libya, he returned to Senegal. In 2023 Pathé's younger brother, who recently turned 20 at the time I met him, also tried unsuccessfully from Mauritania. "I'm the youngest in my family," he tells me, his eyes looking on the ground as he struggles to find the right words. "I have seen my father, my brothers, and my uncles try to make it, but none have gone very far. So I told myself, why not me? If I succeed, my whole family will be comfortable. That's why I found the courage to leave. Since many people from my village and family had taken the road to Mauritania, I wanted to do the same."

The story of Samba's family, like many other families in Senegal, shows how mobility practice as an imagined endeavor is passed down across generations. These imaginaries are shaped by family histories, community narratives, and the repetition of routes taken before. In Samba's family, each new attempt to reach Europe draws from the experiences of those who tried before: brothers, cousins, and sons following familiar paths not only because they are known, but because they are imagined as the best way forward.

If mobility practice is rarely imagined in isolation, it not only follows family trajectories but is also shaped by the experiences, advice, and stories of friends and acquaintances, whose journeys help make certain routes more visible, viable, or risky than others. As we have seen above, Boulaye had grown disillusioned with the difficulties of obtaining a visa, and decided instead to educate himself about irregular routes. His story illustrates this interplay between family influence and peer networks. "At the beginning, I thought that taking the pirogue from Senegal was the only way; I didn't have all the

information,” he tells me, noting that his father had crossed the Atlantic to reach Spain in 2006. His initial understanding of mobility was shaped by this familial precedent, which made the sea route appear as the natural path to follow. Yet this perception changed when he talked about his plans to leave to a Senegalese friend living in Spain: “He told me that taking a pirogue from Senegal and traveling all the way down there is too long and risky. Sometimes the pirogues aren’t well-made, and the sea, it’s dangerous, you know.” Instead, the friend suggested an alternative that Boulaye had not previously considered:

“He advised me that instead of taking that risky route from Senegal or even Mauritania, where there could be problems, I should take the shorter route. My friend said, ‘What I advise you to do is better. You can take a car from Senegal to Morocco.’ I never knew that. He is the one who set me on the right path.”

In Boulaye’s case, the imaginary of mobility was first anchored in his father’s experience but was later reshaped by the situated knowledge of a friend. His evolving understanding underscores how shared stories and peer-to-peer exchanges can recalibrate one’s sense of possibility, reorienting imagined geographies of movement and recalculating the perceived risks and opportunities of different paths.

Similarly, Moussa, shared how his own decision to leave for Morocco was influenced by the trajectory of a childhood friend, Alioune, who had left from the same village some years earlier to try crossing to Europe through Libya. “I knew there was a certain way to go to Europe, a clandestine way,” Moussa explains, lowering his voice, acknowledging that his friend had paved the way and passed along important information. Yet, Libya’s reputation for violence, detention, and exploitation shaped Moussa’s imagination of risk and pushed him to seek an alternative route. “But since Alioune faced so many difficulties in Libya, another friend and I decided to go to Morocco instead.” Beyond his friend’s accounts of Libya, family influence played a crucial role in choosing Morocco. Moussa explains how his mother, after witnessing the tragedies of pirogues leaving Senegal, would have never allowed him to take that risk. Out of respect for her, he eventually chose the Moroccan route instead, which they both perceived as “easier”.

This dynamic, where routes are judged not only on perceived physical danger but also on what families consider acceptable, frequently shapes imaginaries of mobility, especially since families often finance these journeys. Babacar

provides a clear example of this logic, as he justifies his decision to travel through Mauritania as a “morally acceptable choice” for his family:

“I had decided to go to Mauritania to take the pirogue, instead of leaving directly from Senegal, because I knew that if I stayed here in Senegal and asked my brother to pay for my travel, while I was in my country, he would never accept it. But if I left the country, he would say he would help me do it. Because my brother wouldn’t accept me travelling like a clandestine from Senegal. But if it is from Mauritania, no problem, because it is not your country.”

In both Moussa’s and Babacar’s cases, mobility as an imagined practice is shaped less by the objective risks of the journeys and more by the social and cultural meanings attached to particular routes. Their imaginaries are deeply intertwined with family perceptions and moral evaluations, which significantly influence how these routes become acceptable or not. The pirogue crossings from Senegal, is marked not only by the real threat of death but also by the social stigma, rendering this route unbearable to both Moussa’s mother and Babacar’s brother. Crossing from Mauritania or Morocco, instead, is not only imagined as “easier” in terms of logistics and risk (whether or not this holds true) but as more morally and socially acceptable within the family sphere, making it possible for them to obtain both material assistance and emotional support for the journey.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored how the encounter between the will to move and the impossibility to do so interacts with and generates a rich terrain of imaginaries that shape mobility as a practice even before any movement occurs. Mobility is tied to imaginaries of a better life, one that promises opportunities otherwise unattainable without the “right” passport. In this sense, mobility operates as an imagined practice through which alternative futures are envisioned and pursued despite structural constraints. Yet, rather than framing mobility solely as a mechanical reaction to structural constraints, I have shown how people in Senegal engage in mobility through the projection of aspirations and the negotiation of the meaning of a full life in relation to wider socio-economic and cultural contexts. In this context, mobility practice as imagined is not reducible to fantasy or illusion; rather, it is a deeply material, affective and moral engagement with possible and tangible futures. Through the narratives presented, I have identified three interwoven elements that constitute mobility practice as imagined: the imaginary of *tekki*, the imaginary of Europe, and the imaginary of routes. These imaginaries do not simply precede mobility but actively shape the conditions under which its practice becomes thinkable and actionable.

Theoretically, understanding mobility practice as imagined invites us to see mobility not only as movement constrained or enabled by borders, but also as a space of meaning-making, desire, and political imagination. Imaginaries of mobility function as contested and dynamic fields where alternative futures are articulated, where agency is expressed through anticipation, and where the colonial logics of border control are both reproduced and disrupted. In this sense, mobility as an imagined practice is a generative lens for rethinking the politics of movement, not only in terms of who moves and how, but how and why mobility is made meaningful, desirable, and possible in the first place. The imaginary of *tekki* reveals how socio-cultural notions of success, structured by gender norms and expectations, animate the desire for movement. Here, mobility becomes a terrain through which individuals navigate the pressures of family obligation, patriarchal structures, and socio-cultural expectations. What emerges is not simply a reproduction of dominant norms but their redefinition and contestation. While the desire to “make it” in Europe cuts across gender lines, the meanings ascribed to success are deeply gendered, shaping not only the decision to move and the perceived feasibility of doing so, but also how men and women differently experience and express

their desire to travel. For men, the will to move is often shaped by a desire to fulfill gendered expectations, realising masculinity through economic success and family provision, while women's will to move frequently reflects a more subversive reworking of *tekki*. Although still a minority, some women imagine mobility as a means to detach success from patriarchal logics, asserting autonomy both within and against traditional kinship structures. In this sense, mobility becomes a gendered space of negotiation and redefinition. Yet for both men and women, *tekki* is not solely dictated by socio-cultural and familial expectations. It also carries an individual dimension, where the will to move becomes a vehicle for personal aspiration, self-actualisation, and the pursuit of dreams that exceed conformity to socio-cultural gendered norms.

The imaginary of Europe, closely tied to *tekki*, operates as both a horizon of aspiration and a field of ambivalence. It draws from colonial residues and global inequalities, but is sustained by lived narratives, popular culture, and a grounded, if idealised, sense of dignity, rights, and opportunity. Rather than a naive El Dorado, Europe is imagined as a space where social and gendered forms of *tekki* might be realised, where personal transformation can occur not only economically but morally and socially. Importantly, these imaginaries exist in tension with the material and symbolic violence of European border regimes, which paradoxically both reinforce and destabilise the vision of Europe as a site of fulfillment. Finally, the imaginary of routes reveals how border externalisation does not simply block movement, but forces a reconfiguration of its geographies, temporalities, and moral logics. The proliferation of so-called “irregular” routes is not merely a symptom of closure, but an active site of imagination, where knowledge is embodied, transmitted, and reworked. As such, mobility is rarely imagined in isolation, but emerges within dense networks of kinship, friendship, and community. Crucially, it is the very perception of visas as impossible to obtain due to bureaucratic hurdles, repeated rejections, and widespread scams that fuels people's imagination of alternative routes. In contexts like fishing communities, familiarity with the environment, spiritual beliefs, and intergenerational knowledge converge to produce routes not only as spatial paths but as social and affective infrastructures. Moreover, even in places far from the sea, social proximity, shared histories of migration, and repeated attempts by friends and family members create conditions in which imagined routes circulate within families and villages, becoming durable imagined geographies shaped by collective notions of risk and permissibility. In this way, the mental encounter with border regimes not only stops safe and legal movement through physical

barriers, but shapes the social and moral terrain in which mobility is imagined and legitimised.

By centring the way people imagine mobility, this chapter contributes to a decolonial feminist approach to border externalisation in several ways. By moving beyond frameworks that focus solely on physical movement, the chapter demonstrates how the concept of mobility practice enables a more expansive understanding of the migratory journey, one that encompasses desires, aspirations, imagination, and collective imaginaries, regardless of whether movement is realised. This theoretical lens challenges understandings of migration as merely an individual act of physical displacement, situating it instead within the broader socio-cultural, affective, and political terrains that shape how movement is envisioned, pursued, or deferred. By emphasising the collective, intergenerational, and family-based dimensions of imagined mobility, the chapter unsettles binaries between personal desire and collective obligation. It shows that the colonial encounter between border externalisation and African mobility cannot be understood without considering one's decision-making process as influenced by histories of migration, gendered expectations, economic pressures, and kinship-based moral economies. Through the lens of mobility practice as imagined, the chapter brings into focus the contradictions and tensions people navigate: between individual agency and familial duty, between the pressure to succeed and the cost of leaving, and between hope and the reality of border regimes. In doing so, the chapter also reframes mobility as an ongoing negotiation with possibility, revealing that aspirations for movement are often grounded in careful reflection, informed risk-taking, and a situated awareness of the challenges ahead. These aspirations, moreover, transcend economic necessity, encompassing desires for independence, education, knowledge, better working conditions, escape from oppressive gender relations, personal growth, and self-realisation, thus offering a critical alternative to narratives that depict migration as reactive: fleeing hunger or poverty, and driven primarily by economic desperation. Crucially, this chapter also shows that mobility is not only about geographical relocation but also about transgressing the social and symbolic boundaries of what is deemed permissible or possible. As such, it foregrounds the subversive power of imagination as a site of agency where individuals rehearse and rework alternative futures against structural constraints. This contributes to decolonial feminist theory by challenging racialised and gendered representations of mobility that reduce African movement to bare survival or deviance. Ultimately, understanding mobility as an imagined practice opens up new analytical space for capturing the complexity of how people negotiate

their mobility within border regimes, not only through physical crossings but also through imaginaries that persist, adapt, and circulate across time and space. In doing so, the chapter advances a decolonial feminist critique of border externalisation that takes seriously the emotional, moral, and imaginative labour that sustains the will to move and its (im)possibility.

Chapter V: Backdoor to Europe: Lived Experiences of Im/mobility

Bocar and I sit in the shade of a tree at a local restaurant, joined by a couple of his friends, all *adventuriers*, as they like to call people who have tried to migrate to Europe. We share a plate of *yassa poulet*, the spicy, tangy chicken stew simmered with caramelised onions and marinated in lemon and mustard, its aroma mixing with the dust and the strong smell of fish coming from the delta of the river next to us. We are talking about their most recent attempt at border crossing, and they joke with each other while simultaneously fantasising about their next moves. “If they don’t let us in through the front door, we take *la petite porte*, the backdoor,” Bocar says, scooping up the last spoonful of rice. “The backdoor?” I ask, not fully understanding what he means. He chuckles:

“Exactly. Think about it. Open Google Maps and try finding the fastest route from Senegal to Paris, it won’t show you anything. Not even Google knows the way. But we do. There are several backdoors into Europe, and those are the ones we take.”

They burst into laughter and nod, each adding fragments of stories, nights spent hiding in the boats before departure, bribes paid at checkpoints and close encounters with border guards that left their hearts pounding. I am struck by the tone of their conversation, the way they recount these moments not from a place of despair but as a shared journey of self-discovery, a passage through risk and uncertainty that forged bonds, knowledge, and a sense of collective adventure.

This chapter analyses the encounter between border externalisation and people on the move, advancing a grounded understanding of how external borders are challenged, endured, and contested, as well as the human cost of doing so. It examines mobility practice as a situated and relational engagement with the Euro-African border regime, an encounter that renders mobility practice both

embodied, through the physical and psychological toll of movement, and political, through acts of endurance and the ongoing negotiation of mobility. In this context, mobility practice is shaped both by racialised governance that creates unequal access to movement, and people's persistent will to move despite coercive constraint. Drawing on narratives from Senegal and along the journey to Europe, the chapter follows two key moments of the diffuse encounter with the externalised border: maritime and terrestrial. Through this lens, mobility practice emerges not only as movement through space, but as a continuous negotiation with power, violence, and possibility.

As the conversation with Bocar and his friends suggests, the journey to Europe involves navigating alternative routes, the *backdoors*, designed to circumvent border controls. In this context, mobility unfolds across water, land, and sand, as individuals travel by whatever means are available. For most people on the move from Senegal, the journey to Europe is far from linear: it is a complex, fragmented process marked by detours, reversals, and continual adaptation. Movement frequently shifts direction in response to shifting border regimes, economic limitations, or sudden risks, reflecting both the volatility of the journey and the persistence of those undertaking it. A small but valuable body of primarily Francophone literature has explored some aspects of the journey from Senegal to Europe, focusing on Atlantic crossings (Arcand & Mbaye 2013; Andersson 2014; Mbaye 2014; Hallaire 2017; Maher 2018; Ngom 2017, 2021) and desert routes (Andersson 2014; Gueye & Deshingkar 2020), with attention to networks, journey preparation, and motivations. This chapter builds on and expands this literature in several ways. First, rather than isolating a single route, this chapter is uniquely comprehensive as it follows people's trajectories of mobility from Senegal northward, by bringing together stories of both Atlantic crossings and overland journeys to North Africa, allowing for a richer account of the diverse nature of lived experiences across different border zones. By integrating these different trajectories, it offers a more nuanced understanding of how people encounter different instances of border externalisation while on the move, as the same individuals often navigate multiple borders through multiple backdoors during their life. This broader scope makes it possible to capture both the layered, cumulative lived experiences of im/mobility and the stories of those who may never reach Europe, or even North Africa. Taken together, these stories powerfully illustrate mobility as both an embodied practice, shaped by lived experiences of hardship, waiting, and exhaustion, and a political practice, marked by the persistent search for movement, the exercise of agency, and the refusal to be contained by bordering structures. Besides, while much of the literature on

unauthorised migration from Senegal centres male experiences (Deshingkar & Gueye 2022) or frames women's mobility within family reunification (Sakho & Dial 2010, Tall & Tandian 2010, Coulibaly-Tandian 2007), this chapter foregrounds women as important actors of (irregular) mobility. It highlights their autonomous journeys, decision-making, and embodied experiences across land and sea, thereby revealing the gendered dimensions of mobility practice and challenging narratives that render women's mobility invisible or dependent on men.

The chapter is structured around two key sections, each exploring a distinct colonial encounter within the broader landscape of border regimes. Through a detailed and empirically rich analysis of close physical encounters with the border and its diffused effects, each section illustrates the complexity of black mobility practice in both its embodied and political dimensions. The first section focuses on the organisation and lived experience of unauthorised sea crossings by pirogue. It begins by detailing how these perilous journeys are carefully arranged, from preparation and departure to navigation, highlighting the roles of smugglers and community networks. Drawing on testimonies from survivors, the section then delves into what people feel and think while at sea. It also examines the interruptions and disruptions that occur when adverse weather conditions, encounters with the Senegalese navy, or interceptions by European border authorities force travellers to return to Senegal. This section thus sheds light on both the broader context of maritime border control and the embodied realities of crossing. The second section traces overland migration routes through Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, following the main paths taken by the people I met across Senegal. It explores how these journeys are organised and the complex interplay of social networks, local guides, and informal support systems that enable passage. This section offers a collection of narratives from different border encounters, detailing the specific challenges faced at each stage, such as surveillance, detention, violence, and exploitation, and the creative strategies people deploy to circumvent or resist these obstacles. By focusing on the experience of moving through these landscapes, the section reveals the constant negotiation of power that characterises overland mobility across North Africa.

The Maritime Colonial Encounter: Crossing by Pirogue

Due to Senegal's geographical position, with a long Atlantic coastline stretching approximately 1,500 km to the Canary Islands, the Atlantic route is one of the main backdoors into Europe, particularly for those living or working along the coast, as discussed in Chapter IV. The journey is undertaken aboard pirogues, traditional wooden fishing boats that are repurposed for travel to Europe. Boats may be specially built for the journey, or older ones purchased for several thousand euros, though these are often more prone to capsizing or taking in water. Pirogues vary in size but are generally around 20 meters in length and 3 meters in width. According to my interlocutors, they frequently exceed their maximum capacity, carrying anywhere from 60 to over 150 passengers. While the ideal season for crossing is between April and September, when the ocean is calmer and temperatures warmer, people tend to depart virtually the whole year around. If a boat departs from centre and northern Senegal under optimal weather conditions the journey can take around one week, whereas departures from the South may take up to fifteen days. Although there are no precise statistics on how many boats successfully reach the Canary Islands, the combination of treacherous Atlantic conditions and the absence of consistent search and rescue operations makes this route one of the most dangerous ways to reach Europe, with an average of 33 deaths per day (Caminando Fronteras 2024).

In the last decade, intensified border controls, both at sea and on land before departure, have made these journeys even more perilous. To avoid interception, many boats now take longer routes, navigating very far from the coast. These routes expose travelers to rougher seas, longer travel times, and greater isolation. In the event of distress, the chances of being rescued are almost nonexistent. This dynamic is well illustrated by the account of an anonymous pirogue captain, a seasoned fisherman who has witnessed countless departures toward Spain and piloted one himself:

“To avoid the patrol boats, we take the international route, so the journey takes longer. Since the Senegalese and Spanish navies are close to the coasts, we continue until we reach the international waters where cargo ships pass. We take that route to reach Spain because taking the faster route means you'll get caught. But if you take the longer one, you

risk running out of fuel or supplies, and you're at great risk because turning back is impossible."

This practice of taking longer detours through the high seas is not an isolated case. Other fishermen and passengers shared similar experiences. One anonymous fisherman who has attempted the journey multiple times explained how the fear of interception and criminal charges (as discussed in Chapter I, piloting a boat is punishable by up to ten years in prison under Senegalese law), does not stop captains. Rather, it compels them to choose riskier routes:

"Some captains are so afraid of the navy, because if they get caught, they risk prison. So some decide to head toward Cape Verde, and then turn toward Morocco. This means being so far from the usual routes that you would not even see the navy or cargo ships."

Organising the Journey: Nuancing the Figure of Smugglers

Organising a trip to the Canary Islands requires several months of preparation and involves several steps and actors: the *convoyeur*, or travel promoter, who is in charge of providing the boats and the material; the intermediaries, those who find people interested to travel and normally negotiate the prices; the captains, those who steer the boat, normally up to four per pirogue. In most cases, people never meet with the trip organiser or captains, and only talk to the intermediaries. The roles of trip organisers, intermediaries and captains can sometimes overlap or become blurred in people's accounts. Some travellers negotiate directly with a captain they know, bypassing intermediaries altogether, while in other cases, the same person steering the boat is also the one who organises the journey collectively with others. Although there is no fixed price for the journey, interviews conducted at various departure points along the Senegalese coast suggest that costs typically range from 60,000⁵ CFA to as much as 800,000⁶ CFA. The cost of a journey is rarely fixed and is instead negotiated in a proportional and relational manner. It was common for people to tell me that they paid what they could or exchanged material items like a phone for passage. The amount actually paid often depends on what someone can afford and on their personal connections with the person organising the journey. This is especially evident in fishing villages, where the actors involved are well known and trusted. For instance, many people I spoke

⁵ Approximately 90€

⁶ Approximately 1200€

with, particularly those departing from their own village, claimed they were able to negotiate a lower fare or even travel for free due to these ties. A telling example is Saliou, a young fisherman who, as discussed earlier, has made several attempts to reach Spain. Recounting his most recent departure, he describes it as almost accidental, made possible entirely through his close connection to those involved in organising the crossing:

“That day I had gone out fishing, but when I returned, I had pain in my foot. I went to the beach and sat on the sand. That’s when I noticed people preparing for the journey. Suddenly, someone from my village, whom I knew well, approached me and asked, ‘Don’t you want to go to Europe?’ And I said, ‘Of course, I want to go!’ He told me the name of the person organising the trip, and I knew him very well. He was an older friend from our neighbourhood, a good guy. Later, someone else went to negotiate the price with him, and we settled on 150,000⁷ CFA.”

This example illustrates how the social fabric of coastal communities plays a crucial role in shaping access to migration routes, often bypassing formal structures of payment in favour of relational trust and opportunity. It also highlights how intermediaries involved in organising these journeys are often deeply embedded in local social networks (Maher 2018), and how journeys are negotiated within communities among people who tend to know each other, complicating the dominant portrayal of smuggling as a purely criminal enterprise driven exclusively by profit and exploitation (Achilli 2018). Unlike professionalised smuggling networks, typically composed of organised groups operating across vast territories that exploit and victimise people on the move (Aziani 2021), in Senegal those facilitating pirogue departures are often neighbours, friends, or relatives, and small networks who operate locally. Although these arrangements can involve overpricing and, occasionally, scams, especially since the increase in departures and the surge of smuggling as a profitable business (Vives 2017) they rarely, if ever, include coercion, exploitation, or deliberate violence. The importance of social ties, rather than purely economic calculation, is evident in how prices are determined on an individual and relational basis.

Besides, while financial interest certainly plays a role, it is not the sole motivation. For instance, travel arrangements are sometimes made on behalf of relatives or coordinated collectively by groups of friends and fellow fishermen. This is exemplified by an anonymous village chief from a small

⁷ Approximately 230€

town in northern Senegal, who recounted how he personally organised the journey for his entire family and several other community members. He explained how he oversaw the construction of a pirogue and managed all logistical aspects of the trip, driven by the desire to improve the difficult conditions his family faced. In his case, financial profit was definitely not the main motivation; rather, he wanted to ensure the safest possible journey for his family by taking direct control of the organisation. Another similar case, where the organisation of the trip was motivated not solely by profit but by the desire to reach Europe under the best possible conditions, is that of Daouda, Assane, and Modou, all young men from a village some kilometres south of Dakar. Daouda, a skilled fisherman in his twenties and actively involved in organising their journey, shared how the money collected was never meant for personal profit. Instead, it was a practical necessity to ensure the trip was well-prepared, securing a sturdy pirogue and enough food and water for everyone on board. “This money isn’t to get rich,” he tells me, almost offended by my question of whether they would earn something from the organisation of the trip, “we use it to organise the convoy so that we can leave in good condition.” He explains that when people do not know who is behind the organisation of a trip, they risk ending up in old, fragile boats prone to capsizing or setting off without enough provisions:

“With this money, we buy food, water, fuel, and even the pirogue itself, which can cost anywhere from 2 million to 5 million⁸ CFA. Think of it as a shared contribution, everyone chips in to leave together. No one pockets the money for themselves. The so-called smugglers? They’re actually the organisers, the ones who take the journey themselves. They are the captains.”

While financial gain cannot be excluded, for them, this is not the main goal. As they explain, they see a clear distinction between journeys arranged by people who do not travel themselves, often driven mainly by profit, and those organised directly by fishermen like them, who have a genuine stake in the safety and success of the trip because they are part of it. Assane explains this vision clearly:

“A captain is an adventurer, a migrant himself. The organisation is collective. There are about twenty or thirty people who put the trip

⁸ Approximately 3000€ to 7600€

together. But all the people who organise, they also leave. That's what makes our journey different from others."

Modou, who also attempted that same departure, described how the arrangement works in practice:

"It's all about contacts. Right now, I know these two people. I have a good convoy. There's trust between us. I know the captain, he's a good one. I know this convoy is solid, so I'll tell them if they want to contribute as well, that's it."

This perspective is echoed by another anonymous interlocutor, a woman in her forties living in a coastal town south of Dakar. From a family of fishermen and living near the coast, she has witnessed several generations of departures, including people in her family who used to organise trips. As she explains the organisation of the trip, she makes a clear distinction between "trustworthy" and "not trustworthy" trip promoters. For her, there is a fundamental difference between fishermen who know the sea well and often participate in the journey themselves, and those she refers to as "businessmen," who approach the trips purely "as profit-making ventures." She emphasises the importance of knowing "if the person organising the journey is a fisherman, a pirogue owner, or simply a businessman." If the organiser is a businessman, she insists, they should not be trusted because "it is not right to do business by putting people's lives at risk." However, she insists, "not all trip organizers are the same," noting that some are motivated by more than profit, taking a genuine interest in the success of the journey, and recognising that the outcome of the trip can affect their reputation within the community, as many of the "good" trip organisers consider it their moral duty that people arrive safe at their destination. As her words show, considering this form of mobility facilitation simply as a business transaction often fails to capture how social ties and mutual support are embedded in economies of proximity, where these journeys are intertwined with tightly knit social relations (Maher 2018). This also reflects a recurring reality I encountered across Senegalese coastal communities and through multiple interlocutors, emerging in various anecdotes. During the first departures in the early 2000s, almost all those who organised and undertook journeys were fishermen. Over time, however, the criminalisation of irregular migration and the growing number of departures made this business increasingly profitable for people outside these communities, leading to the coexistence of locally organized trips alongside more commercialised, networked arrangements.

While these accounts should not be overly romanticised (financial gain remains a factor, scams by trip organisers may occur, and the journey is undeniably life-threatening), they challenge simplistic narratives that depict professional smuggling networks solely as exploiters of naive migrants. Most of the people I met referred to the so-called smugglers as *un ami* (a friend) or familiar acquaintances from the neighbourhood, emphasising either their personal closeness to the trip organisers or their ability to negotiate lower prices, and saw the financial transaction involved as a normal way of doing business. This framing also reflects how people understood themselves as making calculated choices about their mobility. Moreover, it shows how captains are not primarily motivated by profit; instead, they invest great care in preparing the journey to ensure its success. In Senegal, stories like these reveal mobility as a socially embedded practice grounded in socially embedded relations of friendship and trust. This collective organisation of movement, despite financial interests and risks involved, represents a political practice that asserts people's shared and collective agency and reciprocal care in navigating restrictive border regimes. Smuggling through the Atlantic backdoor is therefore a socially embedded mobility practice that emerges at the intersection of community networks, individual agency, and the structural pressures of border regimes.

Surviving the Atlantic: Lived Experiences

Once the pirogue has been secured, along with the captains and passengers, logistical preparations for the journey begin several days in advance. The boat that will carry people to Europe is anchored offshore to avoid drawing attention, and departures usually take place at night to stay hidden. A few days before departure, smaller pirogues discreetly transport supplies, water, food, fuel and one (or more) backup engines, along with passengers in small groups. According to several accounts, some people even spend several nights aboard the pirogue before setting sail. Mobility takes shape through tactics of concealment and delay over several days that are central to how movement is deliberately planned, coordinated, and enacted under constraint. Daouda vividly describes the preparation process:

“Today is Saturday; let's say the pirogue is set to leave next Wednesday or Thursday. Starting today, we will discreetly transport small amounts of supplies to the big pirogue. A few jerrycans of fuel here, a few provisions there, never all at once, always bit by bit. The large pirogue can sit out there for days, and people will just assume it is a fishing boat.

You see, because there are nets and fishing gear onboard, we even cast the nets into the water to maintain the illusion. People will think it is just another fishing vessel. But in reality, the boat is waiting for the passengers. The navy won't notice us. Among fishermen, we can tell it is not an ordinary fishing boat, and that it probably is a migrant vessel [...]. On the day of departure, that's when we finalise everything, loading the remaining fuel, food, biscuits. The small pirogues return for the last supplies, delivering them to the big boat before heading back to shore. Then, the journey begins."

Daouda's description shows that mobility practice here is strategic and politically aware. The night departures and the deliberate staging of the pirogue as a "fishing boat" during preparation reveal how movement is carefully disguised through familiar, socially recognised routines to evade surveillance. Once out in the ocean, the captain oversees the entire trip: navigating with GPS, explaining how the journey will proceed, and managing the rationing of food and water to ensure supplies last the whole way. A key challenge is making sure provisions stretch for the whole trip so distribution follows a strict system. As Modou explains:

"The way we organise food is simple but essential. Before departure, we buy biscuits and couscous, basic supplies that are easy to store and prepare. Onboard, we have a large pot for cooking. We boil water, and once it's ready, we pour in the couscous. When it's cooked, we distribute a portion to everyone."

Yet, provisions can become dangerously scarce, especially water. Daouda recalls how, as the journey progressed and water ran low, the captain took strict control of rationing:

"At the beginning of the journey, people wasted water without thinking. But after a certain point, we had to start rationing it, and it was the captain who took charge of distributing it. If someone was thirsty, they would be given just a small amount, enough to wet their lips, nothing more. Sometimes, though, people became so desperate that they drank seawater."

While the captain is in charge of navigation, some of the passengers can take on specific roles when it comes to meal preparation on the boat. In many journeys, when only men are aboard, those who can cook are expected to prepare food for everyone. However, when women are present, this

responsibility often falls to them, reflecting how the pirogue serves as a social microcosm that reproduces on the sea the same gender roles found on land. While being a woman on board can mean being assigned more traditionally feminine tasks like cooking, it can also provide a degree of protection, as women are often seen as more vulnerable and less capable of enduring the journey compared to men. Awa, a woman in her early twenties from a village in the Kolda region, made the long journey from her home all the way to Dakar before boarding a pirogue, hoping to improve life for herself and her family. Traveling alone as the only woman on board, she recalls how the men took care to shield her from any hard work.

“I was the only woman on board, and maybe that’s why they made sure I was taken care of...The men wouldn’t let me do anything. They told me to do nothing, to stay calm, and remain quiet, simply because I was the only woman.”

Dieynaba, whom we met earlier as she recounted the difficulties that compelled her to leave as a divorced woman, shared that the hardest part of the journey for her was managing basic needs and have some privacy:

“Well, the hardest thing was that, as a woman, when you needed to go to the bathroom, being surrounded by men was not easy. Sleeping was also difficult. When it was time to sleep, it wasn’t comfortable. You weren’t at ease with all the men around. We had to squeeze together like sardines in a can, it wasn’t easy, and the nights were especially tough”.

Similarly, Ndiayo, a young woman in her early twenties from a village in Tambacounda, echoed this sense of unease during her attempted journey from Mbour. Although she initially travelled alone from her village, she later found herself among a group of women on the pirogue. She recalls, how, for safety and comfort, they stuck together, wary of potential harassment from the men on board:

“There were about twenty women on the boat, and normally, we women stayed in our corner together, while the men stayed in theirs. It was better that way. Sometimes, you know, it’s hard to spend days and nights with men you don’t know. That’s why we stayed together as women; it was easier that way, especially for doing the things women need to do.”

This embodied experience of mobility reveals how gender shapes not only the division of labour on the pirogue but also the spatial and affective dimensions

of the journey. Gender conditions not only who is allowed to move, women being a notable minority on the pirogue, but also what they are expected to do or not do, such as performing traditionally feminine tasks like cooking, and how they relate to others during transit, notably by sticking together with other women for greater protection and comfort.

The affective dimension is not only crucial among women, but also among all those on board. The journey can be physically overwhelming, especially for those unfamiliar with the sea, as many struggle with seasickness from the very start. In such moments, travellers recall the importance of travelling with friends who can offer comfort and reassurance. For Assane, travelling with his friends Modou and Daouda, both experienced fishermen, was also crucial. Having them by his side provided reassurance in an environment that was entirely foreign to him, as he had never set foot on a boat before:

“For those who are new to the sea, the best thing that can happen is to travel with people they know. If you board a pirogue full of strangers, where no one knows you and you don’t know anyone, it’s incredibly difficult. You feel isolated, unable to communicate, and that can lead to even more stress. But when you’re surrounded by friends, everything becomes more bearable. That’s why, for me, having Modou and Daouda there was so important. They knew the sea, they knew the pirogue, and they knew exactly what to do. Whenever I felt uneasy, they were there to calm me down, to explain what was happening, to help me get through it.”

This highlights how mobility practice is fundamentally relational and affective, lived through bodies that are not only positioned by social norms but also profoundly shaped by emotional and interpersonal dynamics, showing how mobility is also a space of collective embodied negotiation of risk and care. At the same time, it highlights how social relationships among those on the boat, just like the negotiation and organisation of the trip, remain central throughout the journey.

As good captains tend to time departures with favourable weather, many of those I spoke with recalled that the early hours of the journey felt surprisingly smooth, even exhilarating. Passengers chatted with friends, sang songs, and filmed videos for social media. Fanta, a woman in her early twenties from a fishing village north of Dakar, scrolled through her phone and showed me a video she had recorded for TikTok. In it, passengers waved and laughed at the camera, posing playfully. “This was right after we left,” she said, smiling

briefly. But this sense of ease was short-lived. As the hours stretched into days, the sea changed, and so did the mood on board. Hunger began to gnaw, thirst became harder to ignore, the heat pressed in from all sides. Fanta remembers one of those moments vividly. By the third day, she says, the food was nearly gone: “Feeding that many men for days takes a lot, but sometimes, you leave with only a third of what you need. So those who’ve done this before, they know not to eat much in the beginning. They wait.”

The danger, she says, was not just hunger but panic. As people realised the food would not last, suspicion turned toward the captain, and tensions flared. “In moments like this, people turn on the captain, blaming him for the situation,” she explains. To prevent the situation from escalating, the captain, together with a few others, came up with a story: they began to tell the passengers that *djinns*, mystical spirits known to wander the sea at night, had boarded the boat and taken the food: “People believed it. You’d hear people whispering: ‘The djinns came last night. They took everything.’ Some even said they’d seen them.” The story, she explains, monetarily redirected anger, but was short-lived: “Fights still broke out. Some people were thrown into the sea. Others accused each other of witchcraft. It was chaos. But when people are desperate, they’ll believe anything.”

Death is also a tragically common occurrence on the pirogue, where dehydration and hypothermia take their toll. When someone dies, there is no choice but to throw the body into the sea, to prevent the spread of illness. This act leaves lasting trauma, haunting people for months or even years after their journey. Fanta vividly describes the horror of watching her travel companion die before her eyes:

“At first, it’s all laughter and joy. You eat together, you talk, you hold on to hope. But then, after a while, you watch the person sitting in front of you, someone who was just talking to you, someone who was holding on, start vomiting, growing weaker and weaker... until they die. And then, they are thrown into the water. And you? You’re still sitting there, trapped in that pirogue, watching it all happen, not knowing when, or if, you’ll ever reach land. And as more people die around you, you start to wonder... will I be next?”

The pirogue becomes not only a space of physical endurance but also a terrain of fear and powerlessness. As night falls, the fear intensifies. The sea, calm by day, turns wild and unpredictable, while the cold creeps into the bones, exacerbating the mental and bodily strain. Abdourahim, a herder in his forties

from a village near Tambacounda, had never seen the ocean before his first pirogue journey. Accustomed to the open plains, he described the sea as a world so unfamiliar it seemed almost supernatural:

“At night, it’s hell. You see things, things you can’t even imagine! You see things you’ve never seen in your life. You say to yourself, ‘The world is ending.’ I swear, many people go mad when we’re on the pirogue. It was my first time at sea, and I was so scared, I kept my eyes closed the whole time because what you see out there, I can’t even describe. My skin hurt because the saltwater corrodes you. And on top of that, it’s so cold, especially at night, with the water hitting you. It’s freezing.”

To cope with the cold and the constant waves crashing against the boat, passengers try to shield themselves however they can. In an attempt to stay dry, some wear plastic bags as makeshift clothing or huddle under plastic sheets, but these improvised protections often fail against the force of the sea. Modou recalls how even the most prepared among them were soaked and exposed:

“Some people have plastic covers to protect themselves from the water, while others wear plastic clothing. But even those who wear it still try to find places where the water doesn’t enter. And those who don’t have such protection have no choice but to endure the water hitting them.”

He explains that the constant wetness and the instability of the boat makes it nearly impossible to find rest. With no dry space to lie down, many go days without sleeping, and the effects of sleep deprivation, combined with hunger, thirst, and hypothermia, gradually wear down both body and mind.

Interrupted Journeys

For most of the people interviewed, with the exception of a few belonging to the 2006 generation of travellers, the Atlantic journey did not end on the shores of the Canary Islands but was interrupted along the way. This interruption could stem from a decision made on board in response to harsh weather conditions or severe circumstances on the pirogue, such as dwindling food and water supplies or the exhaustion of fuel. In other cases, it could result from a close encounter with border enforcement, whether the Guardia Civil, the Senegalese Navy, or the Senegalese police before departure. These encounters

are manifestations of border externalisation in practice, shaping both the conditions under which people travel and the strategies they must adopt to evade interception.

Having a reliable and discreet trip organiser is crucial for avoiding detection before departure. Much depends on the ability of the organiser and the captain to carefully choose the right moment when police patrols are minimal. Yet this level of coordination is not always achieved. Several people I interviewed recounted aborted departures caused by poor planning or carelessness. Modou, reflecting on a failed attempt, emphasises how quickly things can unravel: “Sometimes the problem is a lack of organisation, poor planning,” he says. He recalls a particular incident in Toubab-Dialaw, a quiet coastal town known more for its art scene and tourists than departures.

“I remember going there and hearing that a convoy was supposed to leave that night. But already, for six days, there had been too much movement. The house was full of people, and neighbours were right next door. People were coming and going at all hours.”

In a place frequented mainly by white tourists, this unusual activity drew attention. “It raised suspicions,” Modou continues, “the neighbours called the police. They came, searched the house, and found everyone. That ruined everything.”

In other cases, the journey was stopped before it even began because the trip organiser was arrested or the police found out about the plan and informed the Senegalese navy. These moments reflect the dense entanglement of mobility with the infrastructures of border externalisation, where control is enacted long before people reach the water, shaping not just routes but the very conditions under which journeys must be prepared and kept discreet on land. Because police interception of these journeys is so common, some trip organisers strategically engage in bribery to negotiate safe passage. Modou explains one of such instances:

“There was one convoy that had left from Joal some months ago. The organisers went to see the police and paid them to ensure they could pass without interference. The police told them, ‘In the morning, you can leave freely. We won’t stop you because it’s us who will patrol. But at 6 p.m., another brigade from Thies will patrol here. If they come, we can’t do anything about it. So, you need to leave before 6 p.m.’”

By timing their departure accordingly, they avoided police interference entirely. This example illustrates the porous and negotiated boundaries between formal state authority and informal power arrangements, showing how mobility is enacted through tactical, ongoing negotiations with the very forces that seek to control it. Mobility thus emerges as a political practice that simultaneously contests, accommodates, and at times co-opts border regimes.

While some journeys are interrupted before departure through direct encounters with police or naval forces, other journeys face interruption en route not because of immediate border enforcement, but due to the harsh and often dangerous conditions under which people are forced to travel. Many boats ultimately decide to turn back when worsening weather or deteriorating circumstances make continuing the journey safely impossible. This decision is usually taken by the captain or the majority of those on board, sometimes sparking heated debates between those determined to press on and those who prefer to return. Dieynaba, who travelled with four other women, two from her village and two from The Gambia, recalls how, while navigating between Mauritania and Morocco, the winds grew stronger, sparking panic among many on board. The majority ultimately decided to turn back:

“When the wind picked up, it was the middle of the night. People started to panic. [...] When the captain asked if we should wait for the weather to improve or turn back to Senegal, most people chose to go back...As always in Senegal, men are dominant, and women... Well, we spoke, but they didn’t listen to us. They preferred to listen to the men. When they asked me, I said we should wait. We had already come so far, why turn back now? We had been at sea for four days; the journey was around 1,500 kilometers, and we had less than 500 kilometers left. We were already so close to Morocco!”

Dieynaba expresses frustration that neither she nor the other women were heard. “They didn’t listen to us. Women are smarter than men, that’s just how it is. If they had listened, we would be in Europe right now,” she says, explaining that their pirogue had departed at the same time as another that arrived in Spain the very next day after they turned back to Senegal. Her words show how the experience of mobility on the pirogue is deeply embodied and gendered, with Dieynaba feeling that her voice as a woman was given less weight than those of the men. “I was so disappointed. I had mixed feelings, anger and frustration. I had already pictured myself arriving in Spain, finding work, earning money, becoming independent, providing for my family. But all of that vanished the moment they decided to turn back,” she adds.

Though women might be consulted during the journey, many of those I met, like Dieynaba, describe a feeling of being excluded from crucial decisions. This exclusion reflects entrenched socio-cultural gender norms that generally reserve certain decisions for men, especially in domains perceived as masculine (like navigation), alongside strategic concerns about women's perceived vulnerability at sea. Dieynaba explains that women are often kept out of important decisions out of fear that, if intercepted by authorities, they might inadvertently reveal the captain's identity or other critical information, thereby jeopardising the entire group. Embodied gender realities, social roles, and power dynamics shape how mobility is enacted and determine who holds more influence over the journey's course.

While Dieynaba believes they could have reached Spain if they had continued, her confidence stands in sharp contrast to the physical toll, danger, and unpredictability that define mobility across the Atlantic. Kalidou's interrupted journey illustrates this harsh reality. A young man in his early twenties from a village in the Tambacounda region, Kalidou was still in school when some older friends working in Mbour's fishing industry convinced him to attempt the crossing by pirogue. Unfamiliar with the sea, he agreed, but his journey ended in near tragedy when the boat capsized near shore. Kalidou is one of the few survivors. His voice is measured, but his eyes rarely cross mine as he talks about it, as if holding eye contact might force the memories closer, make them sharper and harder to contain. He starts from the beginning, recounting the escalation of events:

"After four days at sea, we ran into trouble. Water started entering the pirogue, so we kept scooping it out and moving forward. The first day, the second, the third, the fourth, everything seemed fine. We still had food, we still had water. But then, everything ran out. No more food, no more water. And we were still at sea, lost for 11 days. We had no control. We didn't know where we were going. We had GPS, but it wasn't enough. Out there, in the middle of the ocean, there is no choice. What can you do? You just wait. Wait and pray for the chance to return alive."

Eventually, when they were almost out of fuel, a passing fishing boat gave them a few litres and bottles of water so they could try to turn back toward Morocco. "Our pirogue couldn't make it to Europe," he continues. "It was damaged and taking on water. So, we turned around." But the return was no safer. The fuel ran out again. They drifted for days, unable to steer or communicate, until finally, they picked up a phone signal and saw land, Morocco, on the horizon.

“We were so close to the coast, but then the waves hit us, hard. The pirogue capsized. Many drowned right there in the ocean. I don’t know how I survived, I can’t even swim. Somehow, I made it. But even those of us who lived... When we finally reached land, we couldn’t even walk. Our bodies were too weak. We had spent too long out there, with no food, no water...”

Anatomy of a Pushback at Sea

While decisions to turn back are often shaped by the structural conditions that render the Euro-Senegalese maritime border inherently dangerous, some people shared more immediate experiences of disrupted journeys involving direct encounters with border enforcement. Several interlocutors described being intercepted at sea between Senegalese and Mauritanian waters and being ordered to reverse course. Others recalled being spotted by commercial boats or fishing vessels, who then alerted the Senegalese or Mauritanian navy, showing how border controls become diffused and mundane. The account shared by four fishermen, Bocar, Ndongo, Saliou, and Lamine, offers a rare, empirically rich view of how border externalisation is enacted in the water and how those on the move navigate it. The case, involving a Spanish Guardia Civil vessel intercepting a pirogue at sea between Mauritania and Senegal, sparked media attention in Spain amid diplomatic tensions with Mauritania. Migrant rights organisations in Spain condemned the action as an illegal pushback that denied people access to asylum and fundamental rights protections (CEAR 2023). In response, the Guardia Civil dismissed these criticisms, insisting that all those intercepted were non-vulnerable Senegalese adults. The Spanish Interior Minister further defended the operation, praising the Guardia Civil for carrying out a “humanitarian operation” that “saved lives” (ElDiario.es 2023). The story of this pushback narrated by those who experienced it, allows us to see the other side of the story, tracing the embodied and political dimensions of mobility in a close-up encounter with border enforcement. In this account, fear, violence, and betrayal are registered and negotiated through the body, and political agency emerges through acts of insubordination and endurance in the face of border control.

In August 2023, Bocar, Ndongo, Saliou, Lamine, and about 160 others departed from a coastal town south of Dakar. Their journey was carefully planned and well-prepared and the weather conditions were favourable. After two days of navigation, just before leaving Senegalese waters, a helicopter started to fly over the pirogue. Some passengers, already on their third or fourth

attempt, knew from experience that a helicopter's presence was never a good sign. "At first, we didn't realise it was the Spanish authorities," Ndongo explains, saying that they decided to continue the journey nonetheless:

"We had been navigating for two, three, maybe four days before. On the fourth day, the helicopter came very close. That's when we saw the Spanish flag, and we knew immediately it was the Spanish. After that, the helicopter left but came back shortly after, this time accompanied by the Spanish Guardia Civil. We were in the border area between Mauritania, Morocco, and the Canary Islands, near Nouadhibou. That's where they caught us, right at the entrance to the Canary Islands."

As the Guardia Civil's boat drew closer, attempting to stop them, the captain, backed by the passengers, refused to halt and decided to press on for a while longer. At that point, some Guardia Civil officers disembarked onto a smaller boat to approach them directly and asked in French who the captain was. "But of course, we weren't stupid, when we saw the navy approaching, our captain knew to hand over command," says Lamine, "So, when they asked again, 'Who's the captain?' We told them we all were, that we were in this together. Our captain knew exactly what they were after."

Lamine claims that, before departure, they had carefully gathered information from others who had tried and failed to reach Spain, hearing stories of arrests and close calls involving the Senegalese or Mauritanian navies, which helped them know how to act if they encountered border enforcement. Yet, this was their first real life encounter with the Guardia Civil, which took them off guard. Seeing they would not reveal the captain, the officers shifted tactics and asked everyone where they had departed from. Upon learning they had left Senegal, the officers told them to wait.

"We were stuck waiting out at sea for more than an hour, just drifting, before the Guardia Civil came closer again and told us, 'The weather is going to change, storms are coming, it will be very hard for you to reach Spain'. Then, they said they had contacted their superiors, who had approved taking us to Spain. They convinced us, 'Come, we'll help you, you'll get to Spain'. We didn't agree at first, but in a pirogue, decisions are made collectively, and everyone agreed to board the Spanish ship. Seeing it was the Guardia Civil, we thought maybe they were telling the truth, they would help us. So, we climbed aboard".

However, once aboard the Guardia Civil's boat, the atmosphere shifted dramatically. Bocar recalls how the officers' faces hardened, their earlier friendliness replaced by a colder, more hostile attitude. "We could not just jump into the ocean and swim," he says, "so we understood we would be completely under their control now." Onboard, the conditions worsened. They were given only small portions of rice, far too little after such a long and exhausting journey. Their mobile phones were confiscated, cutting off any connection to the outside world. Some passengers, they claim, were even handcuffed with plastic ties. As the situation escalated, the Guardia Civil began intimidating them with weapons and even firing shots in the air. After that, the boat started moving, but they understood the direction they were taking was not towards Spain but Mauritania:

"We, as fishermen, know the sea and the direction. We knew this wasn't right. [...] The boat moved slowly, and we knew they were doing it on purpose, so we wouldn't realise where we were going until it was too late. If they moved that slowly we would approach Mauritania at night so we would not be able to see."

Exhausted from days of travel, the group eventually fell asleep. When they awoke around midnight, they found themselves in Nouadhibou, Mauritania, a place where the Guardia Civil also maintains a strong presence. However, Mauritanian authorities refused to let them disembark, arguing that Senegalese citizens were not their responsibility:

"By this point, we were exhausted, and we began a hunger strike. We were fed up because we realised that neither Spain nor Mauritania wanted us. They had lied to us, threatened us with guns, and we were powerless. We refused food, determined to show them we wouldn't back down. We said, 'Either you take us to Spain, or you bring us back to Senegal. Time is passing' and we thought that, well if they bring us back to Senegal, another pirogue will take us again."

That night, one of the Guardia Civil officers tried to calm their protest by assuring them they would continue to Spain once the weather conditions improved.

"He even told us, 'If you don't believe me, come and see for yourself on the GPS, the weather won't be good. Just stay calm and wait, we will depart on Wednesday and go directly to Spain.'"

Trusting the forecast confirmed by the GPS, the group reluctantly accepted the officer's words. But the following night, despite persistent bad weather and thick fog so dense it was impossible to see or know their direction, the boat suddenly began to move again. "That's when we started to suspect they had lied," Saliou recalls bitterly. "They had promised we'd leave on Tuesday or Wednesday, yet despite the storm, we were moving." As the fog slowly lifted, it became clear: instead of heading toward Spain, the boat was turning back toward Senegal. A heavy mood of defeat settled over the boat:

"We were devastated. When we realised the direction, everyone stood up to check, faces full of disbelief and sorrow. One by one, we sank back into silence, unable to even speak. The promise to keep calm was broken."

Tension grew until one Senegalese man stood up and called on people to protest. Almost immediately, others rose in support. The Guardia Civil officers swiftly intervened, ordering them to sit and stay calm. When they tried to isolate the man leading the protest, the passengers pulled him back fiercely, refusing to let him be taken:

"At that moment, the Guardia Civil started hitting us, not enough to injure us seriously, but they struck us with batons. They surrounded us with weapons, forming a defensive line. And in that moment, I felt pain, and I felt rage."

As they approached the border between Mauritania and Senegal, they realised they were being handed over to the Senegalese navy.

The story shared by Bocar, Saliou, Lamine, and Ndongo presents a quintessential colonial encounter between people's mobility and border externalisation. This encounter makes their mobility deeply embodied, as their bodies endure the physical and psychological violence inflicted by the Guardia Civil, while simultaneously becoming profoundly political through collective acts of resistance: refusing to surrender control, sustaining solidarity, making decisions together, and organising protests and hunger strikes. These intertwined embodied and political dimensions demonstrate how mobility practice in the context of border externalisation is both lived through the body and actively contested as a form of political struggle, even in extremely constrained spaces of agency.

The Terrestrial Colonial Encounter: Overland Journeys

Senegal shares its northern terrestrial border with Mauritania and its eastern border with Mali. These neighbouring countries serve as key transit points for people en route to Europe. From Mauritania, people on the move generally pursue one of two options: either attempt to travel directly to the Canary Islands from Nouakchott or Nouadhibou, where the distance is significantly shorter (approximately 800 km from Nouadhibou, the northernmost point in Mauritania), or transiting through Mauritania to enter Morocco and eventually cross from there. The route through Mali is taken by those seeking to reach North Africa, particularly Libya and Morocco, but also Tunisia to a much lesser extent. Along this journey, nearly all people I spoke with followed the same trajectory, passing through Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. From Niger, some continued directly to Libya, while others crossed into Algeria, often described as the *carrefour de la migration* (migration crossroads) as it provides multiple pathways into Libya, Tunisia, or Morocco. While Tunisia and Libya remain key departure points for reaching Italy by boat, Morocco remains generally more accessible to Senegalese citizens and offers a wider range of backdoor routes, making it the most popular choice among many people I met, also thanks to a strong Senegalese community there. From Laayoune in Western Sahara, less than 150 km from the Canary Islands, some attempt sea crossings, an increasingly common route due to heightened controls at more tightly controlled northern points. Other Moroccan backdoors include sea crossings across the Western Mediterranean to Spain's southern coast and attempts to enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the only terrestrial border between Africa and Europe, where people scale fences, swim around, or use small inflatable boats.

The logic of land journeys is partially different from that of Atlantic journeys, where people look for a direct route to Europe. In fact, land journeys rarely follow a linear path and can last anywhere from months to years. They are frequently disrupted by shifting border controls and changing geopolitical landscapes, which continually reshape mobility routes. As one interviewee described, North Africa is a “playground” for people on the move, reflecting the strategic and adaptive nature of their mobility as they move from one

country to another in search of opportunities to work or to cross. Indeed, overland journeys are dynamic and unpredictable processes, marked not only by movement but also, and sometimes mostly, by prolonged pauses, blockages, and moments of re-orientation (Schapendonk and Steel 2014). Despite ECOWAS agreements promoting free movement between Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and a bilateral protocol between Mauritania and Senegal, border crossings remain fraught with danger. Border externalisation, armed conflict, and instability across the Sahel have fuelled the expansion of smuggling networks, compelling people to pay bribes and rely on intermediaries to avoid armed groups and other threats. Along the way, travellers face abduction, extortion, abandonment in the desert, and well-documented abuses at the hands of smugglers, security forces, and militias. In Libya, the dangers are especially acute, with widespread reports of imprisonment, torture, and even enslavement.

Estimating the total cost of land journeys from Senegal is difficult, as it varies based on the specific backdoor chosen and the circumstances (for instance, some travel by plane to Morocco, whereas others travel by land, with costs being notably different). However, compared to traveling by pirogue from Senegal, the costs tend to be significantly higher. North African boat crossings alone could cost up to €4000, with most people reporting paying an average €2500. Additionally, people incur substantial expenses at border posts, averaging around €50 per crossing, with some, such as Libya, demanding payments of up to €400. To this we must add payment of smugglers, extortion from criminal groups and border guards, and ransoms. Moreover, as many individuals attempt multiple routes over several years, sometimes staying outside Senegal for a decade or more, the total expenses often amount to several thousand euros. Unlike sea journeys from Senegal, however, overland migration typically involves extended stops to work and save money before continuing. As such, land routes from Senegal tend to be longer, more expensive, and marked by prolonged uncertainty.

Organising the Journey: Cokseur, Passeur and the Professional Smuggler

Since traveling irregular land routes without intermediaries is nearly impossible due to tight border controls and constant threats of ransom, abduction, and death, people on the move rely on a complex network of intermediaries who coordinate the journey. Intermediaries secure transportation and accommodation, arrange border crossings within the Sahel,

and ultimately enable passage to North Africa, and from North Africa to Europe. Few travellers take part in “organised trips” where they are taken in charge from Senegal until their intended destination, although not by the same person, whereas most travel “step by step”, relying on different intermediaries they find along the way as they continue moving. In most cases, people rely on a loose network of intermediaries that often originates in Senegal and involves mainly (although not exclusively) three different types: the *cokseur*, the *passeur* and the professional smuggler. The term *cokseur* is used by my interlocutors to refer to the individual responsible for organising the journey, typically a Senegalese national known either directly or through acquaintances, either residing in Senegal or abroad. Often, these individuals have previously attempted the journey themselves and then entered the business of facilitating passage. Informants often describe the *cokseur* as a personal acquaintance, relative, or a contact recommended by someone who successfully reached Europe. The term is equally used to describe those stationed at bus terminals who actively seek out clients for cars and buses heading further north. The *passeur*, literally meaning “one who facilitates passage,” refers specifically to those who assist travelers crossing the desert and navigating difficult borders in North Africa, especially routes beyond Niger and through the Sahara. They are typically known through mutual acquaintances, or contacts of the *cokseur*. They often wait for people at various stages of the journey, or are met along the way. *Passeurs* are described as people with a detailed, up-to-date knowledge of border routes, the ability to bribe guards, negotiate safe passage, and protect travelers from potential threats. The success of the journey, according to most intermediaries, often hinges on having an experienced and trustworthy *passeur*. The final key intermediary, referred to by Senegalese people as “*l’Arabe*”, a term denoting intermediaries often from North Africa, can be understood as the figure closer to the image of a professional smuggler due to their specialised knowledge, resources, and well-established networks necessary to organise sea crossings from Libya, Morocco, or Tunisia. Unlike other intermediaries involved in earlier parts of the journey, who might sometimes work independently and not necessarily be part of structured smuggling networks, “*l’Arabe*” manages the decisive leg of the route to Europe, coordinating the logistics of sea crossing. Interactions with these intermediaries can involve violence, including practices such as selling people to border police, or keeping them in dire conditions. While these three figures play central roles in overland journeys from Senegal, other intermediaries often emerge along the route, occasionally a single individual may take on multiple roles simultaneously, and some people might use intermediaries only for some parts of the journey and not others. This

fluidity and shifting of positions highlights that so-called smugglers do not occupy fixed or well-established roles within a hierarchically organised and well-established criminal network. Instead, the role of intermediaries appears to be socially negotiated, allowing individuals to move in and out of the network, seize opportunities as they arise, and at times leave it entirely, reflecting the contingent and relational nature of mobility practice. Following Richter (2019), rather than viewing smugglers as fixed characters, smuggling is better understood in the context of my research as a constellation of specific practices and relationships that emerge at particular moments, around particular people, and in specific border geographies.

The role of intermediaries facilitating passage from Senegal to North Africa is vividly illustrated by Cheick, a 30-year-old man from Kolda with extensive experience navigating both maritime and overland migration routes. We first meet in front of his tailoring shop, a modest space partially financed through an IOM reintegration program. His wife sits nearby with their newborn daughter, cradling her quietly as he welcomes me inside and shows me the sewing machine he works on daily. After a few moments, he suggests we move somewhere more private to talk. As we walk towards a quieter area in the neighbourhood, he confesses that even if he is barely able to make a living, now that he has a small daughter, he has “stopped migration for a while,” though “not forever,” he adds with a smile. After two failed attempts to reach Europe by pirogue from Senegal a few years earlier, Cheick initially tried to reach Cape Verde, hoping to buy a visa to Europe, before eventually turning to the land route. He first made his way through Libya, and later spent several years in North Africa, moving between different places, working precariously while trying to cross the Mediterranean. Sitting in the shade of a three-storey building not too far from his shop, he bent down and began tracing a rough map of West Africa in the sand with a stick, visually guiding me through the geography and social dynamics of his journey. “This is how it works,” he explains, pointing to each place on his makeshift map:

“There is someone in Senegal, then another person in Burkina Faso, another in Niger, and one more in Agadez. The one in Senegal contacts his colleague in Burkina, who arranges for us to be housed in safe places at night. Then the person in Burkina, in turn, gives you the contact of someone else, and so on [...] Normally, the person you are in touch with first is someone in Senegal, that you pay for the service. But you also have to pay the people who guide you along the way. You arrive in Burkina, and the contact tells you: ‘I’ll show you a safe route!’ Then

you give him his share of the transport cost. For example, on the route from Burkina to Niger, he might earn 10 000 or 15 000⁹ CFA francs. However, between Agadez and Libya, he can make up to 200 000¹⁰ CFA francs”.

These guides, he adds, are usually Senegalese or locals well embedded in the terrain: “They already live in the area, they know the roads, they know the drivers. It’s a network, really.”

Along overland routes from Senegal, smuggling tends to operate through loosely connected, informal networks where travellers usually pay for each stage as they go. Cheick describes these intermediaries as ordinary people who have strong connections and experience of the route themselves. This pattern diverges from the dominant portrayal of smuggling as run by highly organized international criminal networks, since in practice most people encounter small-scale arrangements (Triandafyllidou & Maroukis, 2012). Although intermediaries can come from different ethnic backgrounds, Cheick and many other interlocutors describe most of them as “Senegalese” or as people connected to someone they knew in Senegal, often from their same village or community, or connected by the same ethnic bond. This underscores how, as found in other studies (Richter 2019, Campana 2020), social structures built on ethnic or national ties are a crucial form of solidarity for people on the move. Traveling without these intermediaries, Cheick warns, is dangerous and unwise. “If you travel alone, you will be sold,” he repeats gravely, suggesting the very real possibility of being kidnapped and trafficked, sometimes even sold into forced labour or slavery. “Because you don’t know the route, but they do. Especially in the desert, you have no way to escape,” he adds. For people travelling without official protections, intermediaries are often seen less as exploiters and more as offering an important, sometimes the only, form of protection, helping to lower the risks of detection, arrest, and abuse (c.f. Sanchez 2016). While Cheick describes this as a loosely structured chain of intermediaries, other testimonies suggest an even less formal arrangement, where each link in the chain operates independently, and people on the move must find a new contact at each stage of their journey. These differences in accounts may reflect the diversity of individual experiences, but they may also result from a limited understanding among some travellers of how

⁹ Approximately from 15€ to 20€

¹⁰ Approximately 300€

intermediary networks operate, since most people rely on intermediaries only for a short period and lack a full picture of the entire structure.

Once in North Africa, Cheick explains that crossing the sea typically involves navigating through smugglers, who are often North African. However, direct contact with these smugglers is rare; instead, West African intermediaries, sometimes migrants themselves who have lived in the region long enough to master local languages and social codes, act as crucial bridges (c.f. Richter 2021). In many cases, these are influential members of the communities abroad (c.f. Magallanes-Gonzalez 2020). These intermediaries, Cheick explains, navigate linguistic and cultural divides, facilitating communication and coordination between travellers and smugglers:

“Us, the migrants, you know, we don’t negotiate directly. The organiser, who is an Arab, is the one in charge. Suppose I am a Senegalese living in Morocco and I know a lot of people. The Arab then comes to see me and tells me to find him some clients, or I might know someone who wants to travel and then I can put him in contact with the Arab directly. Once we find the clients, I take them to my house. The clients, they don’t know the Moroccan. They live with me. Once everything is ready, the Moroccan knows that the clients are there, and I’m the one who pays him. Then, on the day we agree on, I work with the Moroccan to make the final arrangements. The Moroccan goes to pay the Moroccan soldiers. He does his work with his brothers. I do my work with my brothers. Each of us does his job.”

His account sheds light on the relational social infrastructure that underpins (and profits from) the journey across borders, evidencing how mobility practice is negotiated through both dependence and risk, shaped by social ties with intermediaries along the journey, and a certain degree of trust and proximity. This reliance on intermediaries is reinforced by the way they operate, primarily through word of mouth, revealing how connections and social networks are fundamental to navigating the journey.

Pape, a 28-years-old man from Ziguinchor, had just returned from North Africa a few weeks prior to our meeting. After spending several years first in Morocco and then in Tunisia, he eventually decided to come back to Senegal. He describes how he began his journey with an intermediary recommended by a friend who had previously used his services to cross successfully:

“I wanted to go with him because he was someone I trusted, someone good, and I didn’t want to go with just anyone. He doesn’t steal money; he really helps people get through! Even if you have money problems, he will help you so you can still pass! It’s true that there are a lot of guides who are bad; even I met many in Morocco. Many people have taken my money, and then when you call them, they give you explanations that don’t make sense. But it depends on the person. This one in Dakar, I knew he was honest because he had helped one of my friends to cross.”

Pape describes the smuggler as someone he knew and trusted, valuing him not only for enabling his passage but also for his honesty and his willingness to help those unable to pay. His account highlights how dominant narratives that portray smugglers solely as ruthless criminals often overlook the social dynamics that shape these relationships and the perception that people might have of them.

Yet, not all intermediaries are the same, and some of my interlocutors do describe tensions that might arise when an intermediary supposedly trusted in reality turns to deception or demands for additional payments, undermining the very networks of trust on which travellers depend. Matar, a man in his thirties from a village in Tambacounda who calls himself *le roi de la clandestinité* for having tried “all the backdoors,” holds a much more cynical view of intermediaries. In his case, he obtained the contact of an intermediary from a friend who had successfully crossed into Spain. He emphasises that knowing whom to trust is crucial, and that reputations travel quickly through networks of friends and family:

“That’s how guides operate. Guides know that if you want to have 100 clients, you have to help at least some people to cross, so these people will then pass their numbers on to others. That way, others will trust the guide. One person in Spain will tell his friends in Senegal, ‘he brought me in.’ So even if they bring just one person, the guide can earn the trust of others this way. That’s how it works.”

In a much more disillusioned tone than Pape and Cheick, he explains that, in his experience, even intermediaries who build a good reputation eventually resort to scamming others, since they cannot secure passage for everyone. Indeed, in most cases, my interlocutors acknowledged the unpredictability of dealing with intermediaries: sometimes one might fall into the hands of a facilitator who provides care, other times encounter scams.

Boukary, a man in his thirties from Tambacounda, had attempted several times to cross into Europe without success. He exemplifies yet another situation that complicates the image of the smuggler: that of people who spend years on the move and eventually find ways to support themselves by becoming intermediaries themselves. This further underscores the ordinariness of the smuggler's profile: intermediaries are not always purely exploitative and professional criminals but often occupy a blurred space alongside those they assist, occasionally turning to smuggling when other economic or migration opportunities are unavailable. With some money his mother had managed to save by selling some jewellery, Boukary embarked on an overland journey "somewhere," as he puts it. At the beginning, he confesses, he was not even sure where he was heading, he just wanted to escape from a life that held no meaning for him anymore. It was only one step after another: first the bus station in Bamako, then Algeria, where he simply followed others who were talking about wanting to reach Europe. "Everyone was just saying 'Europe, Europe, Europe', so I just went along", he says. Once in Morocco, he soon connected with other Senegalese and spent time trying to earn enough to pay for the crossing. He worked sporadically, sometimes in the fields, other times in the street, but jobs were scarce, and each attempt to cross ended in failure. He recalls trying all different ways, yet each effort brought him back to the same impasse. Over time, repeated failures and the difficulty of securing legitimate work in a country where its situation excluded him from formal employment and exposed him to abuses left him with few options. Eventually, he was approached by a Senegalese acquaintance who had helped him enter the country, and who offered Boukary to join his smuggling business. At first, he accepted reluctantly, simply in exchange for food and a place to sleep, as at the time he was living in the streets, "anything was better than that," he says. Gradually, however, he began to build networks of his own and started working independently as a *passeur*. His choice, he notes, is less uncommon than one might think, and at the time it appeared to him the most logical path forward:

"It's that simple, I needed money. Being a migrant comes with responsibilities and daily needs. Without papers, I couldn't get a proper job. So I had two choices: either become a *passeur*, like the person who helped me, or turn to something like stealing or selling drugs."

Through this *business*, as he himself describes it, he ensured he could earn far more than he would in the informal sector and enjoyed relative economic stability, all while never abandoning the goal of crossing into Europe, which

he continued to attempt repeatedly without success. For Boukary, the distinction between being a *passeur* and a criminal is significant. It reflects the ethical reasoning embedded in his mobility journey, challenging dominant, stigmatising narratives and revealing how people on the move negotiate legitimacy and dignity. In his view, working as a *passeur* is a pragmatic survival strategy for those repeatedly blocked in their own attempts to move. The money he earns, in other words, are not circulated within a transnational criminal network, but are instead used to cover his basic needs and those of his family back home. For Boukary, becoming a smuggler can be understood as a response to a situation of protracted precarity faced by people on the move. Furthermore, while he acknowledges that some *passeurs* may engage in violence or illicit acts, he emphasises their role as facilitators who “open the borders,” sharing in the risks faced by those seeking passage. As he talks, he also places great emphasis on collaboration and solidarity, framing his role within a moral framework that he finds acceptable and justifiable, namely helping people, “migrants like myself,” who would otherwise face high levels of risk and vulnerability. Although Boukary and others engaged in similar practices may invoke morality to present themselves as honourable while carrying out activities otherwise considered illicit, stories like his show that the dichotomies of victim versus villain or migrant versus smuggler are far too simplistic to capture the complex realities of im/mobility. For him, taking on the role of a smuggler represented not only a means of making a living, but also a way of reclaiming his self-worth and dignity through what he regards as a well-intentioned job rather than a crime. This also highlights how, while it involves agency, becoming a smuggler is not purely an individual choice but is one shaped by broader restrictive border regimes, which themselves create the conditions of informality and illegality in which these forms of work emerge and become socially embedded (c.f. Richter 2021).

Finally, many interlocutors also make a clear moral distinction between the intentions of the captains steering the boats from North Africa, notably Libya and Morocco. For those I spoke with, captains could either be fellow migrants genuinely committed to reaching Europe, or businessmen primarily motivated by profit, sometimes resorting to scams. Amadou, a man in his forties from a village in the region of Tambacounda who has spent several years moving between Morocco and Libya trying to cross, articulates this perception clearly:

“I trust an African captain more than an Arab one. African captains know the sea because many of them are migrants themselves. Their goal is to get across, just like us. The problem is they don’t always know the

route perfectly. But most Moroccan captains are scammers. The third time I paid for a trip, it was with an Arab captain. He went a few kilometres before saying the engine had a problem. I told him, ‘Brother, the engine is fine.’ But he insisted we turn back, saying otherwise we’d all die at sea. That’s how we lost our money. Arabs are just in it for business, while African captains are part of the migration journey.”

Though this view simplifies a complex reality, since a captain’s nationality alone cannot reveal their true intentions, Amadou’s account highlights how captains can occupy different roles within the journey: some act as fellow travellers, risking everything to reach Europe, while others function as profit-driven intermediaries who exploit people’s vulnerability through scams, as we will see more closely in the stories below.

All in all, these narratives reveal the ambivalent roles of intermediaries along overland routes, challenging the rigid categories of “smuggler” and “migrant” central to border externalisation logics that claim to fortify borders by protecting people from criminals. Intermediaries are not only necessary due to the inherent difficulties of border crossing, but many are or have been on the move themselves, leveraging their knowledge of routes and networks to survive, complicating the simple victim/criminal divide. Moreover, people on the move are not merely victims, as they actively engage with intermediaries to navigate risks and secure passage, or transform into intermediaries themselves as a strategy for survival. For many of them, smugglers are described not as ruthless criminals but as trusted acquaintances or even friends valued for their support and recognised for their services. This is further demonstrated by the fact that people rarely use the word smugglers (*passseur*), but instead more often refer to them with words like *links* or *guides*, terms that convey a social dynamic distinct from a criminal one of exploiter and passive victim. These terms point to a more horizontal dynamic and collaborative nature, where the smuggler is, in many cases, helping people on the move navigate otherwise difficult routes, providing knowledge, or connecting them with others. While engaging the services of a smuggler for cross-border movement does indeed involve a financial (or sometimes even personal) cost, as shown by scholars who have widely documented abuses by smugglers (Tyszler 2019; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2020), choosing not to do so can also be costly, resulting in enhanced violence en route or lost opportunities for improved life prospects. This highlights how mobility practice through smuggling is political as it is embedded in strategic decision-making, with individuals exercising agency to navigate structural constraints, weigh risks

and benefits, and actively pursue pathways that maximise their chances for movement.

Securitised Spaces and Im/mobility at the Senegal–Mauritania Frontier

For those traveling from Senegal to Mauritania as part of the so-called “backdoor” route to Europe, the journey north often begins with the challenge of crossing a border that is as mundane in appearance as it is deeply securitised in function. Two main crossing points mark the passage from Senegal into Mauritania: Rosso and Diama. Rosso consists of twin towns, Rosso Senegal and Rosso Mauritania, separated by the brown waters of the Senegal River. In the bustling chaos of Rosso Senegal, people wait under the hot sun near the ferry landing, while street vendors weave between parked trucks and travellers. Once a space of everyday cross-border interaction, where trade, family visits, and regional mobility were part of the river’s social rhythm, Rosso has become a heavily fortified bottleneck through border externalisation (Ould Moctar 2024). EU-funded biometric technologies line the checkpoints: digital fingerprint scanners, facial recognition cameras, drones, and night vision goggles feed data into broader international surveillance networks (Popoviciu 2023). In addition, border guards receive specialised training to intercept potential migrants as part of a joint initiative between Senegal and the EU. On the Mauritanian side, the IOM’s Personal Identification and Registry System connects directly to Interpol databases, transforming the crossing into a node in a wider security grid (Ould Moctar 2024). What looks like a modest riverside town is, in practice, a front line of European border externalisation. As such, for many I spoke with, Rosso was seen as unpredictable and risky, not only because of the high-tech equipment or trained border guards, but because of the uncertainty of treatment: arbitrary refusals, bribes, detentions, and the fear of being fingerprinted. In contrast, Diama, a quieter border point roughly 100 kilometres west of Rosso, is often spoken of in hushed tones as a preferable alternative. Situated near the Diama dam, the area is rural, surrounded by tall grasses and the wide, flat expanse of the floodplain. Here, crossings are less congested, and the presence of technology is less immediately visible. Several of my interlocutors described it as more “tranquil,” where border controls are less stringent and passage is generally smoother. Still, Diama is not beyond the reach of externalised border control. New border posts have been constructed with EU Trust Fund support under the Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, and increased attention to this route has brought more scrutiny (ReliefWeb 2019). The

crossings at Rosso and Diamo are not just logistical hurdles, but sites where mobility is negotiated, rerouted, and sometimes blocked. These are spaces where mobility practice is both shaped and subverted by the evolving infrastructures of containment.

At the Rosso and Diamo crossings, the flow of people rarely slows. Most of them are ECOWAS citizens, including Senegalese travellers, who in principle should be able to cross the border freely under regional agreements. Though Mauritania withdrew from ECOWAS in 1999, bilateral protocols, such as the one maintained with Senegal, still uphold the right to free movement between the two countries (Ould Moctar 2024). But on the ground, this right often unravels in practice. Many travellers are pre-emptively categorised as “migrants” bound for Europe, stopped, interrogated, extorted, and in some cases, detained by border authorities on suspicion of irregular migration. During my fieldwork in Senegal, I spoke with individuals who had attempted to cross the Senegal–Mauritania border at various points between 2006 and 2024. Despite the time span, their experiences shared striking similarities, underscoring how, since the so-called 2006 “migration crisis” from West Africa, this border zone has become increasingly securitised in line with Eurocentric logics of mobility control (Ould Moctar 2024).

Hamady and Samba, 50-years old brothers from a rural village in the Tambacounda region, come from a family of herders and agriculturalists. They had left Senegal a few months apart, both hoping to reach the Canary Islands via Mauritania. Hamady recalls the crossing at Rosso as particularly difficult. Border police, he claims, would routinely stop Senegalese travelers and demand payment.

“To cross the border there, you have to pay up to 30,000 CFA¹¹, and if the police see that you have more money, they will take everything. I had a little money because I had worked along the way to save up and pay for the journey, and they took everything.”

Without payment, he adds, travellers risked being beaten up or turned back. Samba, who crossed shortly after Hamady, reportedly paid significantly less, 3,000¹² CFA. He attributed this to the fact that he was traveling alone and did not raise suspicion: “I arrived alone in Rosso, Senegal. There were police

¹¹ Approximately 45 €

¹² Approximately 5 €

officers asking for identification, passport, and vaccination card. I only had my ID, so they asked me to pay 3,000 CFA and just let me go.”

Because he did not appear as part of a larger group or visibly prepared for a long journey, he says he felt he avoided being labeled as a potential irregular migrant. Several of my interlocutors who crossed through Rosso also described how police officers routinely target individuals based on their appearance, effectively profiling migrants “by the way they look.” This form of profiling is clearly illustrated in the account of Babacar, a 20-years old man from a village in the Tambacounda region, who attempted at crossing through Rosso:

“The first time I wanted to leave, I went through Rosso, Senegal, but it didn’t work. There were more than twenty of us approaching the border. When we arrived, we showed our documents, and the police saw that we were all from the same region. The Senegalese officers immediately understood that we were leaving to migrate, so they stopped us and held us for twenty-four hours. Yet, we were within the ECOWAS zone and were supposed to be able to cross with our identity cards. But they knew that, given the number of people trying to cross together, we were all going to take the same convoy to Mauritania, because everyone knows there’s a route to Spain from there. So they said, ‘They must be migrants.’ But in reality, we had not agreed to go together with the others. We were not with a guide, it was just a coincidence that we were there at the same time! For example, I met two or three people on the way, so we decided to travel together. Over there, some people were tortured. And as for me, the little money I had, they took it all but they did not let me pass.”

After being turned back at Rosso, Babacar attempted the crossing at Diama. There, he faced further challenges: he was stopped again, stripped of the rest of his money and his phone, and detained alongside three others before eventually being allowed to proceed. Yet, compared to Rosso, Diama’s border is often remembered by those who crossed between 2018 and 2024 as somewhat less fraught. Many recounted that simply presenting an ID was enough to pass, a relative ease that contrasts sharply with the unpredictable and extractive practices at Rosso. These varied experiences expose how borders, though materially fixed, are socially and politically produced spaces, where rights, identities, and movement itself are negotiated and contested in everyday interactions.

Migrants who are stopped and profiled by Senegalese police often face renewed scrutiny upon reaching Mauritania. Several interlocutors shared experiences akin to Babacar's, recounting how, despite paying bribes to cross the Senegalese side of Rosso, they were again detained at the Mauritanian border on suspicion of being "migrants" and compelled to pay additional bribes to secure their release. In all these cases, the formally recognised right to travel to Mauritania for Senegalese citizens is effectively nullified by an informal system of border control where state authorities partake in controlling, exploiting, and racialising mobility. This system, enforced by border guards, relies on bribery, intimidation, and sometimes physical violence to regulate movement. Rather than stopping people outright, the border functions by increasing the cost of passage, both financially and emotionally, while leaving decisions about who crosses and on what terms strikingly arbitrary and opaque.

Once in Mauritania, most of my interlocutors had a single, clear goal: to reach Nouakchott or Nouadhibou, find work long enough to earn the money for the next leg of the journey, and then attempt the crossing to the Canary Islands. The cost of traveling from Mauritania's coast to the Canary Islands is never fixed. People I spoke with reported paying anywhere from 400 000¹³ CFA to 1 500 000¹⁴ CFA, in addition to the cost of crossing the Senegal-Mauritania border. Upon arrival in Mauritania, many gather in overcrowded houses arranged by an intermediary in Nouakchott or Nouadhibou, waiting weeks or even months for the pirogue to be ready and the right moment to depart. Seny, a man in his thirties from a rural village in Kolda, crossed through Diama in 2024 with a friend. They had travelled alone up to the border and only contacted the guide, a Senegalese man whose number had been passed to him by a friend of his in Spain, after entering Mauritania. The guide instructed them to stay in a house outside Nouakchott where they waited for six months. "During all this time, we only saw the guide once; he came to Mauritania, but otherwise, he lived in Senegal," he recalls. On the day of departure, Seny describes how the entire group had to walk 28 kilometres from the house outside Nouakchott where they were staying to the sea, relying only on a GPS on a phone to find their way through the darkness and dusty expanse of the desert. But just as they reached the beach, police arrived, forcing everyone to scatter. After returning to the house and waiting a few days, they tried again,

¹³ Approximately 610 €

¹⁴ Approximately 2300 €

walking the same long route to the shore and waiting from evening until 4 a.m. However, as the intermediary was not showing up, they eventually called him:

“That’s when he told us that he didn’t have a pirogue and that everyone had to figure out how to return home. He didn’t have the means to get us back, so we even had to pay for a car to take us back to the house.”

Despite the deception, Seny and some other people got back to the house in Nouakchott. They spent several more weeks in Mauritania, continuing to place their trust in the guide, largely because he was connected to someone from their own village who had successfully made it to Spain. Knowing no one else in Mauritania, this connection became their main anchor. The intermediary’s repeated claims, “I’m in Senegal, I came to buy pirogues; I have two pirogues, I will bring you,” kept their hopes alive, even as nothing materialised. After weeks of waiting and failed attempts, the police finally arrested them. “It was our guide who had sent them to take us,” Seny recalls bitterly. He and his friend were held for nearly a week in cramped, harsh conditions until they could pay the bribe demanded for their release. Only then were they sent back to Senegal through Rosso. His friend, Seny recalls, crossed back the same day, but he was just too tired and went back home.

From accounts of colonial encounters between people’s will to move and border externalisation at Rosso, Diama, and departure points in Mauritania, we see how the embodiment of mobility starts at Rosso, where black bodies become sites of surveillance and state control, as their very presence at the border is directly linked to suspicion. This surveillance follows their bodies as they move to the cities of Nouadhibou and Nouakchott, where their supposed Europe-bound mobility exposes them to abuse from those they trust, such as guides who take advantage of them, steal their money, or even report them to the police. At the same time, their mobility is also political, as individuals navigate these challenges by strategising around borders and police controls, and always finding new points of entry every time they are refouled.

Suspended in Transit: Algeria as a Terrain of Mobility Practice

Algeria, as one of my interlocutors described it, is “a place of passage, where you stop to make some money and try to reach Europe.” This description captures Algeria’s dual role as both a crossroads and a space of suspension where journeys are prolonged, rerouted, or stalled. Among those I spoke with,

the city of Tamanrasset frequently emerged as a key node in this geography of movement. Situated in the Algerian Sahara, it serves as a gathering point for people from Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and other West and Central African countries. Several interlocutors spoke of the rhythms of life there: the crowded, shared accommodations on the city's outskirts, the informal construction and agricultural jobs taken to save money, and the presence of diasporic micro-communities that provide support and information to navigate the precarity of life there. Unlike Morocco or Tunisia, Algeria has maintained a more autonomous stance toward EU border externalisation initiatives. While the state has implemented internal controls and periodic crackdowns on migrants, these actions are not primarily tied to EU financial or political pressure (Zardo and Loschi 2020). Algeria's historical commitment to national sovereignty, forged during its anti-colonial struggle, continues to inform its limited engagement with EU migration governance frameworks. Still, its geographical centrality in the trans-Saharan corridor has rendered it crucial in the logistical networks that underpin West African mobility toward Europe. For most of my interlocutors, the journey to Algeria did not follow a single linear path. Many avoided the direct route from Mali due to its high levels of insecurity marked by the presence of armed groups and banditry. Instead, the more common itinerary for Senegalese travellers involved passage through Mali into Burkina Faso, followed by entry into Niger and, only then, Algeria. This longer, often costlier route was described as a form of risk management even if it meant spending more time and money. The route to and through Algeria is not merely a checkpoint on the road to Europe, but a layered and shifting terrain of mobility, shaped by the externalisation of borders but also by the everyday strategies of those who move, through waiting, informal labour, collective support, and the constant recalibration of the journey. We zoom into this part of the journey through the story of Abdallah.

Abdallah, in his forties when I meet him, is from the southern town of Kolda. Orphaned at a young age, he was raised by his uncle. He spent his adolescence in Dakar, where he completed his secondary education, but the job prospects that followed left him disillusioned. At eighteen, feeling that his life in Senegal offered little room to dream or grow, he decided to leave in search of a better future. Over the years, he came to know the route through Algeria "like his own pockets," as he puts it with a half-smile, recalling the stops, the dangers and the detours. Though his goal was to reach Morocco, he ended up in the Algerian city of Tamanrasset, a major node in trans-Saharan mobility. One early morning, when his uncle was sleeping, he left Kolda without saying a

word and with little more than a small bag and 30,000¹⁵ CFA in his pocket. His journey began on a crowded bus heading toward Mali, then Burkina Faso. In Burkina, Abdallah met two other Senegalese men who shared his dream of reaching Europe, and they decided to stick together, believing that traveling in a small group would make the journey easier and safer. From Burkina, they boarded another bus to Niger. Their first stop was Niamey, the capital, where they paused to gather supplies for what lay ahead. At a small roadside market, they each bought 5 litres of water and a bag of *gari*, a simple, cheap flour that would keep them going when crossing the desert. Leaving Niamey, they headed deeper into Niger, stopping in Tahoua. Abdallah explained that Niger is full of border posts where police routinely alert the next checkpoint about arriving foreigners. At Tahoua, they were pulled off the bus and taken to the police station. The officers demanded payment despite Abdallah having already paid at the border. Showing his passport with the entry stamp, he remembers he entered in a quarrel with the border guards:

“How can I come here and be asked again for something I already have, my entry stamp? Now, what stamp are you going to give us here inside the country? At the entry to the country, they already ask for 1000¹⁶ CFA. But that’s at the border. I am sure there would not be any stamp given to us there!”

After a brief exchange with the officer, Abdallah negotiated the fee down. His fluency in French enabled him to communicate effectively and helped his two Wolof-speaking travel companions navigate the situation. They travelled on until reaching a border post near Agadez, where they were stopped again; the police, having been alerted by officers at the previous post, quickly recognised the group. At the police station, other English-speaking travellers were being harshly treated and accused of drug smuggling simply because they lacked the money to pay bribes. Abdallah told his Senegalese companions to keep quiet and let him handle the negotiations. After some unfruitful discussion with one police officer, another arrived and, recognising from Abdallah’s language that they shared the same Peuhl ethnic group,¹⁷ offered to let them go for a much

¹⁵ Approximately 45€

¹⁶ Approximately 1,50€

¹⁷ The Peuhl (also known as Fulani, Fula, or Fulbe) are an ethnic group traditionally known for their nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle. They are spread across many regions of Africa, particularly in the Sahel and West Africa, including Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, Togo, and Sudan.

cheaper price. The group continued until reaching the chaotic bus station in Agadez, a bustling space filled with buses, cars, street vendors, and travellers moving in every direction. Carrying little more than backpacks and a water tank bought in Niamey for the desert crossing, Abdallah and his friends were immediately spotted as “migrant-looking” and quickly approached by a *cokseur* offering to take them to Libya. “As he approached us, I told him we were not going anywhere in particular,” Abdallah recalls, explaining that he had been advised by another Senegalese migrant that upon arrival in Agadez, it was better to say they intended to stay in Niger. This strategy was meant to improve their chances of finding a way onward without being forced into a vehicle heading straight to Libya. Discreetly asking around, Abdallah was eventually directed to a man at a ticket booth who carefully explained the routes ahead and the different options. While his two Senegalese fellow travellers chose to continue toward Libya, Abdallah, having heard of the difficulties there, opted for Morocco. The man at the ticket booth contacted a trusted *cokseur* who arranged for Abdallah to take a smaller vehicle to Arlit, where crossing into Algeria was reportedly easier. Before parting, the *cokseur* handed Abdallah the phone number of a relative of his who ran a café in Arlit and would assist him in organising the next stage of his journey.

Arriving at Arlit station, Abdallah was again quickly marked out by his appearance as a “migrant,” which immediately drew a swarm of *cokseurs*, who approached him insistently, firing him with questions, “Where are you headed? Algeria? Libya? Come with us!” Having been warned not to trust any of them, Abdallah carefully deflected their advances by saying he was there to work, not to migrate. “Of course, that wasn’t true,” he tells me with a smile, “I did want to leave, but not under their conditions!” After spending the entire day waiting at the station, his trusted contact finally arrived and brought him to his house where he was able to eat, take a shower, and get some rest. The next morning, he was connected to another family member, who, according to Abdallah, was himself a *grand cokseur*, allegedly a very well-known and very skilled driver who would smuggle him effortlessly into Algeria. That same night Abdallah was put in a vehicle packed with thirty other passengers as he crossed the desert. “In the vehicle, you have to sit like this,” he explains, pressing his legs tightly against his chest to convey how uncomfortable and difficult the journey was. “I had never felt like that before, I had never felt such fatigue. But here I was, in the desert,” he says.

As they neared Tamanrasset, the *grand cokseur* abruptly halted a few kilometers outside the city, instructing everyone to discard their documents to

avoid arrest and deportation if caught by the police. Abdallah carefully concealed his papers in his underwear. With the faint glow of Tamanrasset's lights ahead, all passengers were ordered to disembark, forced to continue individually since traveling all together had become too dangerous. The group split into smaller ones, and Abdallah ended up following a Nigerian man of his same ethnic group whom he had gotten to know along the way and who was familiar with the route having tried already twice. The next city was about fifty kilometers ahead, beyond a mountain they needed to cross. With only the moonlight to guide them, the path was rough and challenging. During the crossing, one man tripped over a stone and fell. "He screamed, but you couldn't stop to help anyone," Abdallah tells me, his soft voice growing firmer for a moment:

"That's just how it is on the journey. We saw him rolling over the stones that night. I stopped briefly to check if he was alive. The Nigerian looked at me and said, 'Come on Senegalese, don't stop. Don't worry about anyone here. Everyone has to save their own life.'"

They walked on a bit longer before deciding to rest. Abdallah recalls the hardships of that night vividly: "We lay close together. The cold was unbearable; it was December and freezing in the north. I had only a piece of cloth to cover my head and a jacket that wasn't nearly enough. We all huddled to keep warm." At dawn, they rose and set off, walking until the first house of the city came into view. The Nigerian man turned to Abdallah: "Senegalese, this is where we part ways. From here, follow the path until you meet other migrants. Ask them for the Senegalese *foyer*, you'll find your brothers there." Abdallah nodded and followed the path as instructed. But before long, shapes emerged in the distance: Algerian soldiers. Fearing that he might be stopped, he avoided the smaller paths and took the main road instead, even though this meant a greater risk of being seen by Algerians in town who had grown used to spotting migrants and alerting the police. Conscious that his appearance could mark him as a migrant, he decided to change his clothes, dressing in a way that would help him blend in and pass for a student:

"I grabbed my bag because I had brought what could look like a suit. I put a white shirt and a tie on. [...] I took my bag and put it casually on my shoulder, as if I was going to school. When I was about to cross paths with a military vehicle or a police vehicle, I pretended like everything was normal and looked away like this. I passed by, and there were soldiers walking, heading to work in the morning. We crossed each other like that on the road but they did not even notice me."

With his neat student clothes, Abdallah navigated the bustling streets of Tamanrasset seeking out the Senegalese shelter. He was soon directed to a modest restaurant run by a Senegalese woman known as *Mama Sénégalaise*. Upon entering, *Mama Sénégalaise* immediately welcomed him like family, offering a warm meal before escorting him to the shelter and securing him one of the best resting spots. At that point, Abdallah had only a little money left and gratefully accepted her support to find work, aiming to save enough to continue onward to Morocco. *Mama Sénégalaise*'s role as the person in charge of the *foyer sénégalaise* highlights a dimension of ethnic and national solidarity that people on the move frequently encounter. Beyond providing a roof over guests' heads, she assumed broader responsibilities for their well-being, ensuring that Abdallah's social and material needs were met, and occasionally assisting with organising the next leg of their journey.

After one year, Abdallah finally gathered sufficient funds to continue. He contacted his older sister in Senegal, whose husband was a respected marabout, seeking guidance and contacts to continue. Through him, Abdallah was put in touch with a Senegalese woman traveling between Morocco, Spain, and France who promised to help him reach Spain for a fee of 1600€. However, the plan unravelled when this woman was arrested before he could pay, forcing Abdallah to scramble for another route. His second attempt also failed, leaving him broke once again. He began working anew, determined to save for a third attempt. During this time, he became deeply embedded in the Senegalese migrant community in Tamanrasset himself. He eventually became the leader of the Senegalese community, a role he embraced to gain social and economic capital, as he advocated for fellow Senegalese *aventuriers* who, stranded in Algeria, faced precarious conditions and limited rights. He soon became so well known that he started to work closely with the Senegalese authorities to push for improved treatment and regularisation of Senegalese migrants in the city. Throughout this period, Abdallah lived in a state of "awakeness," fully attuned to the precariousness of migration and the daily struggles of those around him, while remaining alert to any opportunity that might finally carry him forward. With time, however, his role as community leader granted him certain economic stability and prestige which eventually made him abandon the idea of continuing the journey. After some years in Algeria, shifting family circumstances led him to return to Senegal.

Abdallah's journey vividly illustrates how mobility takes shape in transit under the conditions imposed by border externalisation. His story reveals close encounters with the border not only at official crossing points but through its

pervasive, material effects that follow the “migrant body” throughout the journey. Mobility as an embodied practice emerges clearly in how Abdallah experiences continuous violence and hardship: from abuses by authorities and physical pain in cramped vehicles, to exhaustion crossing the desert, biting cold in the mountains, and persistent fear at night. His body is a site of suffering and control, constantly targeted by smugglers, police officers, street vendors, and border guards who harass, stop, bribe, or beat him simply for “looking like a migrant.” Yet Abdallah’s body is also a terrain of strategic adaptation and agency. He leverages shared ethnicity to build trust with a police officer or fellow travellers, chooses less visible routes to avoid detection, and deliberately disguises his “migrant-looks” at bus stations or dressing as a student when walking through the streets in Algeria. This duality highlights how embodied mobility is not only about subjection but also the active reclaiming of the body as a tool for survival. In Abdallah’s story, mobility is also political in the way he actively negotiates his movement, deciding when and where to travel, whom to trust, and how to engage with intermediaries and border authorities. Crucially, Abdallah’s journey is also shaped by networks of solidarity in movement, which represent another facet of mobility practice as political. Relationships formed with other Senegalese migrants *en route*, the ethnic bond with the police officer, the friendship with the Nigerian companion, and the care of *Mama Sénégalaise*, among others, reveal how mobility is collectively negotiated and pursued. Despite uneven power dynamics within the border industry, these alliances represent moments of cooperation within and against oppressive border structures. Finally, though Abdallah never reaches Europe, his eventual settlement in Algeria reflects another political dimension of mobility through the reappropriation of forced im/mobility and waiting. By building a life in Algeria as a community leader, he transforms an imposed condition of stuckness into an opportunity for generating personal social and economic capital, while also fostering collective resilience advocating for others facing similar challenges to those he faced.

Between Sand, Sea and Razor Fence: Stories of Crossing and Survival in Morocco

Thanks to its strategic geographical position, which offers various routes for crossing, Morocco plays a crucial role as a gateway for those attempting to reach Spain. This has made Morocco a key partner of the EU in implementing border externalisation measures since the 1990s (Gazzotti 2021). During this

period, the first fences were constructed around the towns of Beni Ensar and Fnideq, near the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta (Gross-Wyrzten and El Yacoubi 2022). Representing the only direct land border between Africa and the EU, these enclaves are a critical focal point for efforts to restrict black mobility. As part of the broader securitisation of migration in North Africa, Morocco approved Law 02-03 in 2003, which criminalised irregular migration and paved the way for the normalisation of institutional and criminal abuses against West and Central African migrants (Gazzotti 2021). Around the same period, Spanish authorities launched the Integrated System of External Vigilance (SIVE), first deployed in the Strait of Gibraltar and later extended to the Canary Islands. In 2007, while it was being deployed in Senegal, Frontex also began operating off Morocco's coasts. In addition, Spanish and Moroccan authorities intensified joint patrols across maritime and land borders, a practice that has been repeatedly associated with human rights violations (Jiménez Álvarez, Espiñeira, & Gazzotti, 2020).

The people I met in Senegal arrived in Morocco through different paths from 2010 to 2023. As Senegalese citizens do not need a visa for Morocco, those who have managed to save enough money from the outset and had the right information or link took a flight. Others travelled overland through Mauritania or, more frequently, Algeria. Once in Morocco, the people I spoke with tried to cross into Spain via maritime routes or through crossing the fence at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Border and Sea Crossing in Western Sahara

The Mauritania-Morocco border in Western Sahara is a highly sensitive area, complicated by the presence of the Polisario Front.¹⁸ Geopolitical tensions over the control of this territory directly impact people attempting to cross. Mbaye, a young man in his late twenties from Ziguinchor, attempted this crossing with a friend, following in the footsteps of others who had taken this route before him. Mbaye explains how the journey through the Sahara Desert was marked by uncertainty and territorial disputes:

¹⁸ The Polisario Front is a Sahrawi nationalist movement seeking independence for Western Sahara, a disputed territory claimed by both Morocco and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, leading to ongoing conflict and contested borders in the region.

“The border there was really difficult to cross because it is in the Polisario area. The Algerians say it is their border, the Moroccans say it is their land, and the Mauriticians claim it as theirs. It is chaos.”

When he and his friend finally reached the border, Moroccan police stopped them and insisted that they needed a three-month stamp to enter the country, telling them they first had to fly into Morocco before traveling by land. In this precarious situation, Mbaye and his friend were redirected to a Senegalese man who promised to help them cross for 65,000¹⁹ CFA. After paying, they waited anxiously for days, but the man disappeared, leaving them stranded with few options but finding another intermediary. “Perhaps he used the money to pass himself,” Mbaye reflects, suggesting that the intermediary, too, may have been a migrant navigating the same uncertainties as them. Stuck in Dakhla, a windswept coastal town not far from the Mauritanian border, they spent several weeks in the house of another Senegalese where they spent the Ramadan. Eventually they found another contact who arranged for them to be hidden in a fruit truck. The driver hid them in the fridge, covered with fruit, and drove all the way to Boujdour. Once in Boujdour, Mbaye and his friends work for a while to gather some money to pay for passage to Europe. Life was difficult, Mbaye recalls, and they often slept in garages or in centers hosting people from West and Central Africa, when available. Eventually, they moved on to Casablanca. From there, they learned about “a route from Tangier” from other Senegalese acquaintances who had already made it to Spain. After one year in Tangier, they finally managed to get on a boat, but after only thirty minutes they were intercepted by the Moroccan police through drones. All the passengers were beaten and abandoned in the desert with nothing. At that point, they decided to try their luck in Tunisia, where other friends they met en route were already attempting the crossing.

In Western Sahara, one of the most significant border crossing zones is situated in Laayoune, a city that has become a critical hub for those seeking to reach Europe, largely because of its proximity to the Canary Islands just off the Atlantic coast. While Moroccan authorities maintain intense security operations here, often harassing migrants from Central and West Africa, Laayoune is still considered as a relatively porous zone compared to the north of the country, and thus often preferred to cross. Ramatoulaye, a woman in her thirties from a village in the Kolda region, tried to cross from there two times. After entering Morocco, she was employed for six years as a housekeeper for

¹⁹ Approximately 100€

a Moroccan family, often working up to fifteen hours a day to save money for her journey. Life was far from easy for her. She recalls enduring racism and mistreatment at the hands of her Moroccan employer, who would sometimes dismiss her work with contempt: “Sometimes you work, you finish, then the boss comes, spits, and says it’s not clean. You have to start cleaning everything again, even though it was already clean!”

Despite these hardships, Ramatoulaye managed to save enough money to pay for two attempts to reach the Canary Islands by boat from Laayoune, paying €1200 each time. “In Laayoune, the Arabs bring the wood, and we build the boats ourselves. Even if we pay, it’s still us who construct the pirogues, using wooden planks,” she explains. She spent two months in the Sahara of Laayoune under dire conditions, cramped in makeshift camps with other people. Food and water were scarce. Eventually, a camel herder spotted the group and alerted the police, who rounded them up and took them into the desert, between Morocco and Algeria. There, they were abandoned:

“They put us on a bus, drove us far away, and left us in a place where no one could find us, except for Médecins Sans Frontières, who sometimes flew overhead in helicopters and finally spotted us. There was no food. There was no water. We were more than a thousand people, all black. Men, women, and children. There were Congolese women with two, three children. There were people from everywhere, Guinea, Gambia. Some people even died there in the desert.”

The practice of desert dumping by Moroccan authorities, as described by Mbaye and Ramatoulaye, has been consistently documented over the years. Similar practices are also reported in Tunisia and Mauritania. These operations occur within loopholes created by the EU’s externalised border regimes, as border guards often rely on EU-provided vehicles, equipment, intelligence, and training to carry out these mass displacements (Lighthouse Reports, 2024). A consultant involved in EUTF-funded projects explained that this brutal approach aims to make migrants’ lives difficult, suggesting that repeated abandonment in the Sahara ultimately exhaust migrants and compel them to return to their home countries (Lighthouse Reports, 2024). Yet, after being dumped in the desert, Ramatoulaye’s spirit was not yet broken. She stubbornly returned to Laayoune, worked some more to gather some money and tried again:

“This time, to build the pirogues, they took us to a deep underground hole kilometres away from the sea. We were transported there at night

in a car for hours, we could not see anything outside. When we finally arrived, we were put in this huge pit in the middle of the mountains. Then, they brought us wood, and we used planks to construct the boat.”

She explained that when it was time to leave, there were a lot of people gathered. They were counted, listed, and called in turn to check that no one tried to sneak in. Once the boat they had built was ready, it was lifted and transported by car to the shore, where it was placed in the water and the engine was started. Then the smugglers tried to find a captain, as she recalls:

“They always try to find a captain, a migrant who wants to reach Europe like us but doesn’t pay since he drives the boat. Our captain was a Senegalese man from Kolda. The Arabs gave him €1000, a phone, and some supplies. They told him to take us across”.

The journey, however, ended in tragedy:

“Four kilometres into the trip, the boat broke apart. It split. Many people fell into the water and drowned. I couldn’t swim, but someone told me, ‘Grab onto the back of my shirt.’ He swam while I clung to him. Others, who didn’t know how to swim, screamed until they died, along with their children.”

Waking up disoriented in a hospital room in Morocco, Ramatoulaye was too shocked to try another time and decided to go back to Senegal.

The Algerian-Moroccan Border and Sea Crossing from Morocco

Several people I spoke with who took the overland route recounted crossing from Algeria into Morocco, a border officially closed since 1994 amid deep tensions fuelled by territorial disputes, resource conflicts, and concerns over terrorism. Despite the official closure, irregular crossings continue to occur regularly. This border is one of the most tightly controlled in North Africa, characterised by a stark, heavily militarised presence on both sides. The crossing is further complicated by harsh deserts and rugged mountains that loom over the terrain, making every attempt fraught with danger and potentially deadly. Since the closure, contraband and unauthorised crossings have become woven into the fabric of everyday life. Most interlocutors entered Algeria from Niger, traveling north through the southern city of Tamanrasset before making their way toward the Moroccan frontier. From there, smugglers, connected through networks sometimes stretching back to Senegal, assist

migrants in crossing through Maghnia into Oujda, Morocco. Usman, a man in his twenties from a remote herding village in Tambacounda, recounts the violence and hardships he endured during this perilous border crossing. Once in Algeria, he and some friends reached out to a smuggler through contacts they had back in Senegal. This smuggler accompanied their group up to the Moroccan border but then left them there, alone in a hostile and uncertain landscape. "There, the guide can't help you pass," Usman explains, "you have to figure it out on your own." Left at the foot of the mountains, the group began the trek on foot. "Over there, there are no more cars," he says, "you'll walk for days, sometimes a whole week." Usman recalls how they climbed jagged mountain paths, constantly alert, hiding from police patrols on both sides of the border. "Sometimes we had to cut through fences and avoid military camps. It is at night that we walk," he continues, "and when we see the watchtower of a military camp, we hide quietly, pressed to the ground." After days of relentless walking, exhaustion weighing heavily on their bodies, the Moroccan police finally caught them. They demanded bribes, 200,000 CFA²⁰ for each person. "I didn't have the money to pay," Usman says, "If you pay, they let you go; if you don't, they take you back." Usman could not pay, so he was sent all the way back to Tamanrasset, back to square one. Despite the setback, his resolve did not waver. He found work in the informal sector for several months before gathering the money to attempt the crossing once more. But on this second attempt, the violence escalated. "This time, they beat us, hit us, it was really a disaster," he recalls, his voice faltering as painful memories surfaced. After this, Usman returned to Senegal.

Once across the border into Morocco, others attempt to reach the Spanish autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla, enclaves heavily fortified with razor-wire fences and constant surveillance on both sides of the border. Some try to scale the high barriers under the cover of darkness, while others attempt to swim from nearby Moroccan ports, navigating dangerous currents and border patrols. Still others set out by boat across the Strait of Gibraltar, where, at its narrowest point, just 15 kilometres separate the North African coast from southern Spain. Cheick, a 30-year-old man from Ziguinchor, recounted one such attempt, when he and a group of friends tried to organise their own sea crossing without relying on smugglers or intermediaries. They pooled their money, bought an inflatable Zodiac boat and the necessary gear, including a pump, and camped in the forest near the coastline as they waited for the right moment. Each evening around 7 PM, they would approach the beach to

²⁰ Approximately 305€

observe the movements of border guards. When the shift changed and surveillance thinned, that's when they would prepare to launch. "The boat is inflatable and not very sturdy, a Zodiac. People need to cut their nails or remove their shoes before boarding to prevent accidental punctures," he explains. On the night of their attempt, however, their departure was quickly interrupted. The Moroccan navy intercepted them at sea. Some members of the group tried to negotiate with them, but, as Cheick recalls, things got ugly. "They took our money but still put us through hell," he says. He wondered aloud whether those who arrested them were in collusion with the man who had sold them the Zodiac:

"In the end, everything depends on those making the deals. You can pay them a million, but if they don't want to let you pass, you won't pass. If you pay the Moroccan navy ahead though, they will clear the way for you at sea. When you do, they sometimes mark the boat with a stamp, signalling to all other navy patrols to let you go."

Others shared similar stories, though they also emphasised that paying off the police or navy is not always feasible. With increasing border controls and mounting surveillance, those who tried to cross after 2020 claim that even these informal arrangements have become more unpredictable.

While some, like Cheick, who had spent considerable time navigating life in Morocco, attempted to self-organise their journey across the sea, relying on personal networks and direct negotiations with state actors, others turned to smugglers and intermediaries to facilitate their crossing. Aissata, a woman in her twenties from the Kolda region, had initially hoped to fund her journey independently. After flying to Morocco with money sent by an uncle in Spain, she worked as a hairdresser in a small salon in Rabat, saving every dirham she could. But the earnings were far from enough to cover the cost of a sea crossing. Eventually, she reached out to her uncle again. He agreed to help her a second time, with the understanding that she would repay him once in Europe. He put her in contact with a man he trusted in Senegal who acted as an intermediary with a Moroccan smuggler. The arrangement, as she explains, was that one payment would cover multiple attempts, until she would finally enter. She recalls:

"We spent three days sleeping on the beach before crossing. On the third night, we finally took the boat. The waves were so big that I was so scared the little boat could overturn at any moment. The noise of the sea was so loud I couldn't even feel the people around me. I thought I was

alone. The situation was chaotic. And the boats, they weren't even wooden ones, but inflatable, which made the ride even more terrifying. For the first two trips, it was very cold. On the third trip, it was a bit warmer, but the first two were particularly difficult because of the cold."

On each crossing, she says, there were only a few women among dozens of men on board. Like many women I met during fieldwork, Aissata describes gender as both a vulnerability and a form of leverage:

"Sometimes, it is difficult for women during the journey, but other times we can benefit from the pity of men. Some men show sympathy and give us better treatment, like offering us the most comfortable spots on the boat. But sometimes, there are men who are not sincere, who show an animalistic side and take advantage of you."

On her first two attempts, their boat was intercepted at sea by Spanish authorities. "The Spanish police weren't violent," she claims, "they just didn't want us. They didn't even speak to us. Not a single word. They just took the boat and returned it to Morocco. Like that." On the third attempt, however, the Moroccan police stopped and detained all passengers. This time, the conditions were much worse, and the apprehension also involved violence. She spent several days in a Moroccan prison before being forcibly returned to Dakar. She tells me that some people managed to escape, slipping away during the chaotic transfers between holding centres, but she could not make it. "I was just too tired of trying," she says quietly, "so I stayed and waited to return to Senegal."

Crossing at the Fence in Melilla

One of the most dangerous backdoors to Europe is the fortified border fence surrounding Melilla, one of Spain's two autonomous enclaves in North Africa. The most infamous recent attempt to breach it occurred in 2022, when approximately 2,000 people attempted a mass crossing (ECRE 2022). The assault was met with brutal force. Around twenty-three people died, and hundreds were injured as Moroccan and Spanish security forces coordinated to repel the crossing. The event became emblematic of the increasingly violent deterrence tactics used along Europe's borders. None of the women I interviewed had ever attempted, nor even seriously considered, crossing at the fence. Universally, they described this route as too dangerous. The fence, with its barbed wire and watchtowers, is widely regarded as a masculine endeavour (see Tyszler 2019) as it requires exceptional strength and endurance. Before attempting the crossing, many spend months or even years in the forests around

Nador, the Moroccan town closest to Melilla. These wooded areas offer cover and proximity to the border but are also sites of immense hardship. Amadou, a man in his forties from a village in the region of Tambacounda, spent several years in North Africa and twice attempted to cross into Melilla in 2018. He recounts spending a full year in the forest in a make-shift camp, hiding from Moroccan security forces and preparing for the right moment to act. The “attack,” as he refers to the collective attempt to cross the fence, is never random. It demands meticulous planning and absolute preparation. In the meantime, life in the forest, he explains, is harsh, marked by scarcity and the constant fear of being discovered by the Moroccan police:

“In Morocco, I lived in the forest in Nador. But you don’t dare tell your mother you’re living in the forest! You go up into the mountains where there’s snow and cold, and the Moroccan police come for you, even by helicopter. There are trees, and you climb into the branches to hide, hoping they won’t see you [...] Life in the forest is very difficult. At night it is very cold, and people die because of hunger or illness.”

Survival also demands constant vigilance, but it also depends on a carefully maintained social structure. Amadou describes the camp as a “*petite Afrique*,” a small Africa, where national groups, from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and beyond, organise themselves with discipline. Each group has a leader or “president,” and tasks are divided: some are in charge of looking for food, others cook, while others stand guard at night or track the movements of border patrols. Makeshift camps, often referred to by my interlocutors as “ghettos” or “tranquilos,” are common all across the Maghreb region. They are structured around self-organised units often divided by nationality or ethnicity, and operate as collective survival mechanisms in the absence of state protection. These forms of organisation enable communities to uphold a certain order, collect money from newcomers, limit outside interference, and create precarious spaces of relative safety in the waiting (c.f. Richter, 2019; Bachelet 2025). This micro-society in Nador, explains Amadou, allows them to monitor guard routines and prepare for coordinated crossings:

“Every day, people take turns keeping watch, so we can get to know the habits of the guards. We study them for months. The leaders decide when it’s time to try to cross. Usually it’s on Thursdays or Fridays, or during Muslim holidays, when patrols are lighter. That’s when we make our move.”

When they decide to cross, Amadou explains how people built makeshift ladders from tree branches or scavenged wood, reinforcing them with strips of torn clothing. The strategy to maximise their chances to enter, he says, is to act collectively and in large numbers, hoping to overwhelm the border guards:

“We attack at night, getting close to the barrier and waiting for the right moment to jump. You know, the thing is that border guards don’t know when we will strike and they don’t know how many we are. In turn, we know them, we know how many they are, how they rotate, their habits. The strategy is to go together, all at once. We’re many, over a thousand sometimes. This way, there are more of us than the Moroccan and Spanish guards. We climb, we cut the fences, and we’ll do whatever it takes to get through. Normally, the women won’t jump, they’ll go through the holes opened in the barriers, while men will climb over the fences. Sometimes, while climbing, the police grab your foot, and in those conditions, you can fall and break your arm. Some people, when they fall in a certain way, break parts of their body. The police shoot and dogs chase you.”

When I asked what happened to those who didn’t make it, Amadou lowers his eyes:

“Those of us who were caught... we were mistreated like never before. Beaten hard. The Moroccan police are very violent. They even had dogs to chase us. It’s very hard, very hard. They refuse to let us pass. As for the Spanish police, once you’re on their territory, they stop hitting you. They take you and send you back.”

As we have seen through the different stories of people passing through various backdoors in Morocco, their close encounters with border externalisation give rise to forms of mobility practice that are deeply embodied, beginning at the Mauritanian-Moroccan border and the Algerian-Moroccan border. Here, crossing often involves scams, police violence, and demands endurance and strategy, such as hiding in fruit trucks, like Mbaye and his friend, or in the forest to avoid military camps, like Usman. In Morocco, mobility is shaped by the constant threat of exploitation by ruthless smugglers and desert dumping, as in Ramatoulaye’s and Mbaye’s case, and violent confrontations with the Moroccan Navy or police, who beat people up and subject them to arbitrary detention, as Cheick and Aissata experienced. Similarly, the highly militarised fences at Ceuta and Melilla inflict injuries and even death on those who try to cross, as seen in Amadou’s story. These repeated exposures to danger, cold,

hunger, and physical exhaustion mark people's mobility with pain and struggle. Their bodies become sites where the violence of the border is inscribed, pushed to the limit in a constant fight for survival. Yet, while encounters with the border in Morocco are very much about violence and suffering, we also observe instances of mobility practice as political. This is visible in the ways people negotiate with smugglers for guarantees and with border guards for passage, and continuously reorganise their movement. Most notably, the meticulous planning of group crossings at the Melilla fence, as described by Amadou, is a clear example of mobility as a collective political practice. People in the forest are not a disorganised mass waiting to cross, but a group that strategises together, surveils border guards, chooses optimal moments to act, and prepares tools to attack. These coordinated actions, while not always successful and not free from violence, are powerful attempts to challenge the border regime and reflect a form of collective, organised resistance.

Im/mobility and Racism at Tunisia's Borders

Within the broader trend of migration securitisation in North Africa, Tunisia has long been a key partner for the EU in border control. Italy was the first member state to initiate bilateral cooperation with Tunisia in 1998, laying the groundwork for deeper multilateral engagement in the following decades. This cooperation expanded in October 2011 with the launch of the EU–Tunisia Dialogue on Migration, Mobility and Security, followed by the conclusion of a Mobility Partnership in 2014 (Zardo, 2017). Between 2015 and 2019, departures from Tunisia remained relatively limited, as Libya continued to serve as the main point of departure along the Central Mediterranean route. By 2022, however, the situation had shifted significantly, prompting the European Commission's "Action Plan" for Tunisia, which emphasised reducing departures and strengthening cooperation on border control (Giuffré, Denaro, & Raach, 2022). These efforts culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Tunisia in 2023, which focuses on enhancing migration control and returns. During that time, following President Kais Saïed's public incitation to racist violence, Tunisia has grown into an increasingly hostile environment for West and Central African migrants. Migrants in the country face dire living conditions characterised by pervasive insecurity, constant threats of police harassment, arbitrary detention, and violent racial discrimination. Many endure prolonged periods in overcrowded detention centers or live precariously in informal settlements, often lacking

access to adequate food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Although none of my interlocutors explicitly identified Tunisia as their first choice, some recounts how, after repeated failed attempts to cross from Morocco, they ultimately decided to try their luck there.

This was the case for Pape, a man in his late twenties from Ziguinchor. I met Pape in the backyard of his family house in Ziguinchor, where he lives with his sister and nephews. We sit together on the steps of the house, in the shade cast by its walls. A few goats wander in the garden, tied with ropes, while his two nephews return from school, drop their bags inside, and begin to play with a ball made of cloth in the garden. He has just returned from North Africa after spending several years there. Orphaned by his father when still young, he had left with a friend with the hope of finding a better life for his sisters and his mother. Yet those years stretched on, and while he remained abroad, his mother got sick and passed away. As he tells me this, his voice drops. It was her death, he explains, that finally compelled him to return home. Pape's journey started crossing into Mauritania and then into Morocco. He was twice scammed, paying smugglers for journeys that ended in arrest, and was deeply traumatised by the death of a close friend who drowned during an attempted sea crossing. Alone and exhausted, he was advised by some Senegalese he met in Morocco to try crossing through Tunisia instead. His account carefully details the gruelling passage of frontiers, first between Morocco and Algeria, and then between Algeria and Tunisia:

“I crossed the border from Morocco to Algeria, then Algeria to Tunisia, and it was difficult. More than difficult. It's a mountain we had to cross. It was more than 4 or 5 days of walking. So, it's exhausting, too much; if you don't have courage, you can't go. When you're there, they show you the mountain you have to climb, and you look at it and say no, but with courage, you do it. If you want to succeed, you have to do it. There are no guides in the mountains, when you reach the border, the guide's work is done, so now it's up to you to figure it out. You have to inquire about the cities you will pass through before you leave. When you cross the border, after that, you try to ask for directions.”

His first attempt was met with harsh repression. Caught by the Algerian police, Pape was brought to a police station where he was robbed, beaten, and then released. Regardless, he considers himself lucky, as others were forcibly returned to Morocco. Once he was released, he tried a second time. He describes “feeling in danger the whole time,” especially in the bush where

groups of bandits pose a serious threat to people on the move. Without weapons, he had to rely on stones or sticks for protection. "If you are in a large group, it is manageable, but if you are with few people, it becomes dangerous," he explains. One day, bandits robbed him of his initial supplies of food and water, as well as the few money he had left. That same day, exhaustion and injury overwhelmed him, he fell and broke his foot. "I took my t-shirt and tied it like this around my foot and continued walking. My foot still hurts to this day," he tells me, showing how he still uses a homemade bandage to keep his ankle steady. Hunger became a constant challenge, with days sometimes passing without food, only biscuits to keep going. "You really have to have courage, if you don't have courage, you can't go," he insists. When he finally reached a town, he was very hungry and he had to beg for food:

"The people in towns in Algeria, sometimes they are kind, they give you water, or even something to eat. But other times, they're harsh. Sometimes they chase us away, or they call the police to come get us. They're afraid of black people. When they see someone black, they immediately think you're an undocumented migrant, and they assume you're a criminal. They're scared because when we come out of the bushes, we're injured, covered in dirt, and haven't bathed in weeks. We look rough, maybe even frightening."

During the journey, Pape describes encountering other West and Central African migrants along the way who helped him figure out the route:

"Some people were already used to this journey; they had done it multiple times and knew the route better, so they could guide us. That's solidarity. Sometimes, when we encountered other people, those who had food would share it, and we would give each other water."

Among the group were pregnant women and mothers with children. Pape recalls that men often stepped in to carry the children, explaining that when someone sees a woman burdened with a child, there is a strong feeling of obligation to help by taking the child and walking alongside them. After some days of walking in the forest, Pape's group finally reached the border with Tunisia. However, the border was heavily guarded by police patrols and secured with a fence, forcing them to hide and attempt crossing at night: "During the day, it was impossible, there were too many border guards, and it was easy to be spotted."

The night they finally decided to cross, they scattered in all directions across the border. Some managed to get through, while others were caught:

“It all depends on luck. When they catch you, you have to pay to be free. If you don’t pay, they send you back to Algeria, and from there, back to Morocco again. They hold you until you call your family to send money. If you have money or good clothes, they take everything.”

Pape avoided being caught by hiding in the bushes throughout the day. Only after nightfall did he dare to start walking again, knowing that moving during daylight meant risking exposure: if anyone in the town saw him, they would alert the police. When Pape finally crossed into Tunisia, his hope was to catch a boat to Italy. He found a smuggler and waited for a departure that never came. He was scammed repeatedly: smugglers took his money and vanished, leaving promises of “today, tomorrow” that dissolved into bitter lies. “I gave them all of my money, and they took it, without me ever getting on a boat,” he says. Sometimes, just when it seemed he might finally embark, the police would raid their hiding spots. Arrested again and again, Pape was forced to call home, begging for more money to pay bribes and secure release, only to risk it all once more. Work was scarce and brutal. In Tunisia, he tried selling goods on the street, then working in the fields, but his earnings barely covered food. “In Morocco, at least I could make some money to send back home,” he says, “but in Tunisia, it was just enough to eat.”

For eleven months, Pape endured this precarious limbo, caught between the makeshift camp in which he lived in dire conditions and his precarious job in the fields. But things only worsened. It was the spring of 2023 when the Tunisian President, Kais Saied, started to make racist and violent remarks about migrants from West and Central Africa (Le Monde, 2023). Pape vividly recalls the racial violence that broke out during that period, how “blacks” were chased, beaten up violently, even threatened with death. At that point, exhausted and without hope, he received the news of his mother’s passing. He decided to leave Tunisia and return to Senegal.

Pape’s story reveals how mobility practice within the context of border externalisation in Tunisia is deeply felt throughout the body, shaped not only by formal state violence and physical barriers, but also by pervasive racialised social violence. This is evident in the physical suffering he endured, navigating harsh terrains, enduring hunger and injuries, and repeatedly evading capture. As in other cases, the border is also materially inscribed on the body: Pape’s blackness immediately marks him as an “illegal immigrant” and “criminal,”

making him a target for everyday racialised enforcement carried out not only by border authorities but also by ordinary Algerian citizens in towns near the border, and later by Tunisian citizens. Yet, Pape's mobility is also political, as his story reveals glimpses of agency and resistance through strategies for crossing borders, acts of mutual aid, and moments of solidarity among fellow travellers who share food, shelter, and knowledge of safer routes.

Backdoor to Hell: Between Life and Death in Libya

The final “backdoor” route to Europe taken by some of the people I encountered led through Libya. For those on the move, Libya represents one of the most dangerous and uncertain passages, shaped by years of civil war, fragmented territorial control, and an economy of migration that thrives on both formal neglect and international complicity. From the 1990s, Libya increasingly became recognised as a major entry point into Europe, with bilateral agreements with Italy emerging in the early 2000s. In 2008, the Gaddafi government and the Berlusconi government signed the so-called “Friendship Treaty,” which included cooperation on border control. At the EU level, cooperation on migration management stalled following the NATO intervention in March 2011, but soon resumed under the National Transitional Council (NTC). In 2013, the EU launched several initiatives, including the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), followed by Operation Sophia in 2015, and its successor Operation Irini in 2020. These missions prioritised training and capacity-building for the so-called Libyan Coast Guard and Navy and emphasised joint border control. In 2017, EU leaders endorsed the Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding, which focused on “preventing departure and managing returns,” partly also through EUTF resources. This MoU, renewed every three years, continues to form the political framework for migration management agreements between Europe and Libya (Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022). Decades of externalisation of European border control have helped transform Libya into a holding zone, where violence is systemic and survival is negotiated daily. The stretch between Niger and the Libyan border is itself a violent transit zone. In the absence of a strong state presence, a patchwork of armed and criminal groups, and smuggling networks exerts control over movement and territory. Many of these groups operate with impunity, often with the tacit cooperation, or direct involvement, of state authorities. People traveling this route spoke of being robbed, detained, extorted, and sometimes abandoned in the desert. Inside Libya, the risks intensify. People on the move, face a daily threat of capture, torture, forced

labour, sexual violence, and even slavery. Scholars, activists, and human rights organisations have long documented these abuses. Yet, despite the known horrors, many of those I met still chose the Libyan backdoor. The extreme fragmentation of power across Libya, coupled with deeply entrenched smuggling networks that are often embedded within state institutions, where border guards may also act as smugglers, renders Libya a paradoxically permeable border.

Crossing the Sahara in between Niger and Libya

The first part of the journey to Libya often mirrors the route taken by those who travel through Algeria toward Morocco, passing through Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Until Niger, many describe the journey as relatively “easy” compared to what lies ahead. But from Agadez onwards, the conditions shift drastically. Agadez, a major smuggling hub in northern Niger, marks the beginning of a far more perilous stretch: the crossing of the Sahara into Libya. Those who made it through describe this part of the journey as a “descent into hell.” In 2019, Ibrahim, a man in his late twenties from a village in Casamance, had left home with a few childhood friends, hoping to reach Italy and support his family. They were directed toward the Libyan route by someone in their neighbourhood who claimed it was the most direct path. When I ask him about the desert crossing, Ibrahim recalls the stretch at the border with Libya as the most dangerous part of the entire journey. He speaks of armed bandits demanding payment at gunpoint, of fellow travellers being executed when they could not meet ransom demands, and of the constant fear of being left behind, dead or alive. “I saw people die like that right in front of me, brutally killed. Just like that, your life is gone, and they leave you there,” he claims, describing one harrowing episode in which a Nigerian fellow traveller was cold-bloodedly murdered: “They asked him for 10 000²¹ CFA, but he was hiding 400 000²² CFA in his backpack. His bag fell, they saw the money, killed him and told the driver to leave.”

Police checkpoints, Ibrahim notes, seemed endless, perhaps forty or more between entry and exit, and at each one, a toll had to be paid. “You try to negotiate or bargain, and they hit you,” he explains. Ibrahim also recounts

²¹ Approximately 15€

²² Approximately 600€

stories of people who had been kidnapped and held for ransom by armed groups. Those who could not pay, were sometimes sold into slavery:

“There are people who catch us and tell the bandits, ‘Here are the migrants, keep them here until they pay’. I saw people who spent a year there because they didn’t pay. They tax us 100,000 to 200,000²³ CFA. They sell people there like cattle.”

Such accounts echo a broader and well-documented reality in Libya, where people from West and Central Africa are routinely detained, extorted, and subjected to forced labour or trafficking (IOM, 2017). These practices are not exceptional, but rather part of the violent economies that have emerged around migration routes that prey on the precarity and disposability of black lives on the move. What struck Ibrahim was not only the violence itself, but the ways in which this business was sometimes facilitated through intra-African complicity. “It is Senegalese selling other Senegalese!” he tells me in disbelief.

The violence and hellish conditions of crossing into Libya are also vividly echoed in the lucid and harrowing account of Abu Ndiaye, a thirty-years-old man from a village near Tambacounda, who, like many others, undertook the journey following the advice of acquaintances from his community:

“From Niger to Libya it’s pure suffering. You might have to walk for three days. The desert is empty, there is nothing but sand. Finding even a tiny village is a struggle. That’s what makes it so difficult. Before you reach the next settlement, you might already be on the verge of collapse. There’s nothing out there. The sun burns you alive. Niger is unbearably hot. That’s why so many people die there.”

He describes how survival depends on guides who know the route but demand high fees, and on overcrowded pick-ups packed far beyond capacity:

“In the desert, we take a guide because we don’t know the way. Without a guide, it’s impossible. Everyone crams into the pick-up, they use sticks to pack in even 50 people. Even if someone falls, the car keeps going. It doesn’t stop.”

His journey was also marked by constant fear and exhaustion, as people had to navigate not only the natural dangers of the desert but also the strict controls

²³ Approximately from 150€ to 300€

imposed by heavily armed Libyan patrols. Abu describes how, whenever the driver, usually Libyan, spotted the police, everyone was forced to abandon the vehicle and scatter on foot not to be caught. With no alternative transportation, travelers often have no choice but to start walking across the desert for kilometers under an unforgiving sun, burning sand and without any access to water. This forced marching, sometimes lasting three to four days straight, leaves many with swollen, blistered feet and little to no food for days on end. The suffering is so profound, Abu explains, that people often die on these stretches, victims of exhaustion or dehydration. Despite these unbearable conditions, Abu describes how travellers try to preserve each other's dignity in death:

“When someone dies in the desert, we do what we can. As Muslims, we perform a burial with whatever we have, say a prayer, and then take the deceased's belongings. When we return to Senegal, we give them to the police, so the family can be informed.”

The journey is not only physically punishing but also emotionally devastating, with the constant threat of forced returns weighing heavily on those making the crossing. Abu describes how, if caught by Libyan police in the desert and identified as Senegalese, people are often driven all the way back to the Senegalese borders and simply abandoned there: “They don't even beat you, but honestly, sometimes a beating would be better than what they do. Libya is unbearable. You have to be tough, have a strong heart.”

While the journey across the desert is harrowing for all, the risks are even more acute for women. Sexual and gender-based violence is a pervasive threat along the migration corridor from Niger to Libya, with nearly 40% of women reportedly experiencing such abuses (UN Women 2021). Yet, as with many aspects of migration, this experience is not uniform. The women I spoke with acknowledged the prevalence of rape, abuse, and mistreatment on this route, but emphasised that they themselves had not been directly subjected to it as all travelled with trusted intermediaries who protected them. Aicha, a young woman in her twenties from a rural village near Kolda in Casamance, travelled to Libya in 2017. She claims she was accompanied and protected by her paternal uncle, a well-known *passeur* in Libya with strong connections across the region. This strategic kinship tie allowed her to navigate the journey with a degree of shielding that few others could access:

“Women face enormous difficulties, many problems, including rape, abuse, physical assault, and mistreatment. But I was really lucky; I am

an exception. I really benefited from many advantages on the road, but it's not something given to just anyone."

Her uncle was familiar with the route from Mali to Burkina Faso, from Niger to Libya: "In all the areas where there were dangers he made sure I was being helped and hidden. He was also in contact with the bandits in Libya, so he agreed to finance them to let me pass." Paying trusted smugglers who cooperate with border police and other non-state authorities along the journey, is not only a strategy to cross more easily, but also a deliberate means of lowering the risk of additional abuse, highlighting the ways in which financial and social resources intersect to mediate exposure to harm. For women, in particular, these arrangements can serve as a form of shielding from sexual violence, harassment, and other gendered risks that disproportionately affect them along the journey. This is something I consistently found among the women interviewed who reported being shielded from such abuses thanks to the protection of trusted intermediaries.

Still, the protection Aicha received did not shield her from the emotional and physical toll of the journey. She recalls the exhaustion of sitting cramped in vehicles for days, the anxiety of running out of money and food, and the overwhelming fear that accompanied each stop. One moment in particular stayed with her, a memory from Niger, in the house where the group she was traveling with was meant to spend the night:

"When we got to the house, we found that the owner of the place had been killed. I was the one who found the body. We were told it was the bandits who killed him. That's a memory I still carry with me, the corpse right in front of us. It was the first time I had seen something like that. At that moment, I thought I was going to die. I was scared."

Crossing the Sea from Libya

Once in Libya, Ibrahim, Abu and Aicha hoped to cross the Mediterranean and reach Italy or Malta, departing from coastal areas west of Tripoli, especially Zawiya, Zuwara, and Sabratha. These departure points form part of a well-established infrastructure of irregular migration, where smugglers manage the logistics, often placing travelers in makeshift accommodations near the sea while waiting for the right moment to depart. Yet, as the testimonies made clear, the organisation of these sea crossings in Libya is entangled in a deeply fragmented political context. Here, the absence of a unified state authority has created fertile ground for a shifting and unpredictable network of actors, armed

militias, criminal enterprises, and state forces that often operate in collusion. As Ibrahim puts it during one of our conversations, “you never know who is really in charge. One day it’s the police, the next day it’s a group with guns. In Libya everybody wears a uniform.” The cost of the journey, as reported by those interviewed, varied widely, ranging from 800€ to nearly 4000€. While some managed to board boats undetected, not everyone made it as far as the sea and some were detained on land or fell victim to scams. Interceptions at sea by the so-called Libyan coast guard are also common. Several people I met described being caught just minutes after departure, only to be returned to detention centers or handed over to militias.

For Aicha, the journey ended abruptly at the shoreline, just meters from the boat that was supposed to carry her across the Mediterranean. She had been waiting with others near the beach outside the city of Zuwara, where the smugglers had gathered the group in preparation for departure. The boat was already on the sand, ready for the crossing. But just as people began to move toward it, gunfire erupted: “The Libyan police came before we could leave. They started shooting in the air, everywhere. It was pure chaos. Everyone was screaming and running, just trying to survive.” In the confusion, she fled into the nearby bush with a man her father’s younger brother had assigned to accompany her. “We didn’t even think, we just ran.” They made their way into the forest under cover of darkness. Aicha was injured by the fire during the escape, but her travel companion helped her back to the house in Tripoli where they had been staying all along. Though she avoided arrest, the experience left her physically wounded and emotionally shaken, ultimately deciding to make her way back to Senegal.

After the brutal attempts to cross through Morocco’s heavily fortified fences, Amadou turned his hopes eastward, setting his sights on Libya. His multiple attempts in Morocco had already tested his physical limits, but what awaited him along the Libyan coast was another set of challenges. Amadou recounts being scammed not once, but twice by Libyan captains. The first time, it became clear to him that the captain had pre-arranged a deal with armed actors patrolling the sea. Just a few kilometres offshore, in fact, the captain slowed the boat’s engine deliberately, until another vessel approached:

“We were stopped in the middle of the sea. They had guns and uniforms, but I still can’t tell you who they were. In Libya, everyone wears a uniform. Everyone has weapons. It’s not really police, it’s just bandits who decide who gets to move and who doesn’t.”

One of the armed men who stopped them tied Amadou's boat to theirs and towed them back to the shore. Then, pointing their guns at the passengers, the men threatened them: either pay or be imprisoned. Each person was asked for 300€ in exchange for their freedom. Those without money faced detention. "In Libya, everything is business," Amadou remarks bitterly, "even your freedom has a price." The second attempt felt even more humiliating. The captain, also a Libyan man, set off with what appeared to be a faulty engine. Only a few meters into the sea, the boat suddenly stopped. "He told us the engine had a problem, but we all knew it wasn't true. It was just a game. He brought us back and asked for more money. It was all planned."

After this experience, Amadou became increasingly wary of captains. "When the captain is a Libyan, he just wants to make money," he says with a resigned shrug. "They organise things, but they're not trustworthy. Sometimes, they scam you. Other times, they test you." On his subsequent attempt to cross, he encountered a different dynamic: this time, it was a black African traveller like himself who was chosen to captain the boat. He explained that smugglers often look for someone among the passengers who knows how to handle an engine, offering a free passage in exchange for taking charge of the vessel:

"They'll hand you a disassembled motor and tell you to fix it. If you can't, they kill you. If you succeed, you don't have to pay and are kept in good conditions until the day of departure. You just become the captain like that."

Similar stories echoed in the testimonies of others Amadou met along the way. One night, he spoke with Alioune, another man from Senegal, who had also tried to leave from Tripoli. In his case, the captain had jumped into the water shortly after departure, abandoning the passengers adrift in the Mediterranean, as Alioune told him:

"We were on a small Zodiac. After one kilometre, the captain, an Arab, just leapt into the sea. Left us there. None of us could swim. We drifted from 11 PM to 5 AM. We didn't know where we were going or how to get to Italy."

It was only through luck that one of the passengers, who happened to be a mechanic, managed to restart the engine. They turned the boat back toward Tripoli, defeated but alive. "That's how they do business in Libya," Amadou concludes, "they don't see us as people. Just clients. Just bodies to use."

Among all the people I interviewed, only Ibrahim had successfully crossed the Mediterranean and reached European soil.

“When we were in Tripoli, me and some friends were taken in by an older Senegalese man, also from Casamance like us. He had been living there for a long time. He hosted us until the day of departure. He wasn’t just offering shelter, he was the link between us and the Arabs organising the journey.”

The Senegalese man’s long presence in Libya had earned him trust on both sides: among the migrants, and within the smuggling circuits dominated by Arab actors. He used these connections to help Ibrahim and his group secure a spot in the convoy. On the evening of their departure, the group gathered in a discreet house near the coast, where a smuggler arrived and addressed them directly:

“He asked us, ‘Who among you knows how to drive a Zodiac?’ There was one Senegalese guy in our group who had experience with fishing. He volunteered. But we were all nervous, we didn’t really know if he could do it. Still, if you agree to drive the boat, you’re treated a little better. You might not even pay, because it’s a service.”

Under the cover of night, they reached the beach. There was no chaos, no shots fired, no panic like others had described. Instead, the atmosphere was tense but quiet:

“They told us clearly: if you want to board, it’s your choice. If you don’t, you stay. But everyone is responsible for themselves. No one forced us. We were just determined. We wanted to succeed.”

They climbed aboard and pushed off into the sea. The crossing lasted less than a week, but the psychological toll was heavy. “I’m Diola²⁴,” Ibrahim says with a shy smile, “we are not sea people! I cannot swim in the sea! Even if the waves weren’t too strong, I was anxious. There were moments of fear, nausea, and deep fatigue.”

The group had brought some provisions, and while basic, it helped them endure the journey. On the final day, when Italy was just beyond the horizon, their

²⁴ The Diola are an ethnic group indigenous to the Casamance region of southern Senegal, as well as parts of The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau.

boat was intercepted by the Italian navy: “We saw the Italian Navy. They took us in and brought us to shore. That’s how we survived the sea.”

Inside the Libyan Prisons

While Ibrahim made it to Italy, most people I met were intercepted at sea and brought to prisons. Libyan prisons have consistently been condemned by human rights activists as centres of torture, where people are arbitrarily detained and extorted for money to be released. Detainees are held in inhumane conditions and suffer various forms of degrading treatment and abuses. Some of these prisons are funded through EU border externalisation efforts, both directly, through the repair of detention facilities (Pacciardi and Casaglia, 2021), and indirectly, via the flow of funds between Europe and the so-called Libyan Coast Guard (Pacciardi and Berndtsson 2022), who is directly involved in the management of some of these prisons. As this is a particularly traumatic experience, most people refrained from providing specific details about their time in detention in Libya, limiting to lowering their eyes on the ground and describing it as “hell” or “inhumane.” Among those I met who endured Libyan detention centres, just one spoke about his experience spontaneously.

Habib is a man in his thirties from a small village in the Tambacounda region. He spent several years in Libya, including almost a full year imprisoned in one of the country’s many detention centres. After leaving Senegal and crossing several borders, he finally arrived in the Libyan city of Ghat, housed in the home of a Libyan *passeur* just outside the city. Habib and the other passengers waited for over a month for a vehicle that would take them to Tripoli, from where they were told they would board a boat bound for Italy. But one day heavily armed bandits came to the house. “They carried a lot of weapons. They were not the police. There are no police in Libya, Libya is chaos, so it is just bandits,” he says, echoing the accounts of many others. The bandits captured everyone except the *passeur*, who was released the same day. Habib and the others were taken to a warehouse which acted as a prison for migrants. In the cramped upper-floor room where Habib found himself, around eighty people, men women and even children, were locked behind two doors and a grated window. “To sleep, we had to lie on top of each other,” he says. The price of freedom, Habib explains, was 600€: “If you don’t pay, you can stay there until you die.”

Each week, the detainees were forced to call their families to demand ransom money. Those without phones were given one with credit, and intermediaries,

West and Central African people working with Libyans, helped facilitate these transactions. “They do business with the Arabs,” Habib says. His family had no money, so he remained imprisoned for nearly a year. During this time, he endured beatings and torture, repeatedly asked for money he did not have. “If your parents didn’t call for a week, you wouldn’t eat until your parents called and said they would pay,” he explains. The consequences for silence were deadly; some were killed simply because they could not remember phone numbers. “You know sometimes you forget everything,” he says quietly. To survive, Habib became a mediator between the Libyans and prisoners who needed to call home. Understanding English, French, and Bambara, he acted as a spokesperson and translator, which afforded him somewhat “better conditions.” As a sign of appreciation, he was sometimes given cigarettes and leftovers from the guards: “But I saw small children who were starving to death, so I could not eat. I wanted to bring them food but they would not let me. It was really bad; people died from hunger.”

Food was scarce, handed out only once a day in portions that were both insufficient and nearly inedible, spaghetti barely boiled, served hard, and often causing stomach aches. When people fell seriously ill, they were left to die in pain, without help or treatment. “Some days, two or three people would die,” he tells me. The responsibility of dealing with the dead fell to the living. To prevent the spread of disease, guards forced prisoners like Habib to carry the bodies into the desert and bury them. He describes how they sometimes had to dig the graves with their bare hands, under the watch of armed guards. The hygienic conditions were appalling. Water was a form of torture, poured through the grated windows until the floor was soaked: “At night, we could not even sleep because everything was wet. The water stayed for two or three days, then it dried up and we could sleep again. Otherwise, we would stay seated so as not to wet ourselves.” Escape was unthinkable for Habib. Armed guards, constant surveillance, and the brutal consequences of attempting to flee made any hope of freedom impossible: “It was impossible to escape. The Libyans had a lot of weapons, and they would shoot for no reason.” Guards would sometimes shoot inside the rooms either out of boredom or to vent after arguing among themselves. Weekly shootings were a routine terror, sometimes injuring prisoners deliberately. Ultimately, Habib was released without paying ransom, thanks to his role as mediator.

The stories of those transiting through Libya show how encounters with the externalised border are marked by extreme violence and suffering, deliberately inflicted on people on the move in particularly cruel and dehumanising ways.

These conditions are shaped, financed, and legitimised by the EU's long-standing border externalisation policies in the country. The brutal and traumatic encounters with border guards, aggressors, and ruthless smugglers render mobility an embodied experience, leaving deep physical and psychological scars. Torture, death and enslavement become part of the journey, across the desert, across the sea, or behind prison walls. Yet amid the brutality of these encounters, brief but powerful moments of resistance, solidarity, and agency emerge, reframing mobility as a political practice. In small yet significant ways, people on the move reclaim dignity and challenge the dehumanisation imposed by border regimes: some care for others, safeguarding the belongings of those who die, to return them to grieving families, or burying the dead in the desert with their own hands; others assert agency in the very act of moving, boarding a boat despite knowing the risks, fixing an engine to avoid being left behind, or refusing abandonment at sea. Even in Libyan prisons, where agency is severely restricted, it surfaces in strategic acts such as using multilingual skills to have better conditions. These fleeting moments of resistance and care do not erase the violence of the encounter, of course, yet they reveal how people on the move continue to navigate and, at times, subvert the dehumanising machinery of externalised borders.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined how the journey northward is structured by the colonial encounter between people's mobility and border externalisation. This encounter unfolds through two primary routes, the Atlantic pirogue journeys and various overland passages, yet it is not confined to a single point or crossing. Rather, it is dispersed and recursive, enacted at multiple sites and scales: from the moment one exits Senegal to each successive negotiation with formal and informal regimes of control. At each step, the coloniality of the border is contested, reconfigured, and rendered unstable by the very mobilities it seeks to contain. As border regimes attempt to foreclose routes, people recalibrate, opening new pathways, rerouting through new "backdoors," and adapting to shifting terrains of violence and control. This recursive choreography of movement and containment reveals a dynamic interplay: externalisation measures evolve in response to strategies of movement, just as these strategies emerge in response to shifting architectures of control. This chapter therefore reframes the encounter not as a top-down imposition of sovereign power, but as an ongoing, conflictual process in which border externalisation and mobility are a co-constituted and relational struggle rooted in the afterlives of the colonial encounter.

Mobility practice as an embodied phenomenon underscores how bodies are both the sites and agents of border regimes' power, where physical and psychological suffering inscribe the limits and possibilities of movement. The journeys analysed here illustrate how mobility is a deeply situated, corporeal experience shaped by intersecting structures of race and gender. Looking at mobility through the body, this chapter reveals how black bodies are racialised along migration routes, marked as "illegal" and subjected to violence and control based on appearance. This racialisation functions as a key mechanism through which border regimes assert power and enforce exclusion, producing racialised subjectivities that shape experiences of movement. For instance, at Rosso, individuals are singled out as "migrants" and targeted for heightened surveillance and suspicion. Similarly, in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya black bodies are also routinely subjected to racial profiling, arbitrary detention, and racialised violence by border authorities and local populations. Gender further shapes mobility, as women's bodies are simultaneously constructed as vulnerable and in need of protection. While this can sometimes afford some

degree of care and protection along the journey, it also imposes significant constraints. Women are often excluded from critical decision-making processes along the journey, reflecting entrenched socio-cultural norms, and face heightened exposure to gendered violence, including sexual assault and harassment. Additionally, gendered assumptions can restrict their crossing options, as seen in cases where women are considered unlikely or unable to attempt climbing fortified fences at places like Ceuta and Melilla. Yet, within these constraints, the body on the move is also a site of agency and resistance: it endures physical and psychological suffering while persisting in motion; the shared experience of being a racialised and controlled body becomes a basis for solidarity, while the “migrant body” is deliberately concealed to evade detection, as when appearance is intentionally disguised. Thus, the embodied dimension of mobility practice both reflects the corporeal realities imposed by externalised border regimes and reveals how these realities are contested, as bodies become sites where power is negotiated.

Mobility practice is also inherently political, manifesting not only in acts of organised collective resistance, but also in everyday mundane tactics that create cracks in the border regime. The strategic coordination of journeys, whether by pirogue or overland, reflects deliberate acts of agency, as individuals and groups actively try to circumvent surveillance and recalibrate their routes in response to shifting border controls. The collective resistance enacted during confrontations with the Guardia Civil, or in coordinated group attempts to scale the Melilla fence, exemplifies how mobility operates as a site of political contestation, where people collectively assert their right to move. Yet, beyond overt resistance, mobility as a political practice unfolds through the subtle and continuous deployment of everyday tactics that destabilise border control ranging from concealing oneself during passage, departing at night, bribing border guards, navigating alternative routes, to negotiating with smugglers. These dynamics reveal that border externalisation is not a straightforward enforcement mechanism but a contested and negotiated space in which mobility is continuously shaped, constrained, and enabled, shaped by a fluid and often ambiguous relationship between people on the move and border control. In navigating these ambiguities, people do exercise political agency: their decisions to negotiate, pay, resist, or collaborate constitute acts that assert control over their movement and challenge borders. Moreover, solidarity and care are central to this political dimension of mobility, as mutual support emerges across diverse geographies and moments in the journey. Whether on board pirogues, during the journey in the desert, or inside detention

spaces, people exchange information and protect each other, creating counter spaces of care and resilience that enable survival and passage.

This chapter contributes to a decolonial feminist approach to border externalisation in several key ways. First, by offering a granular, bottom-up account of how border externalisation policies are lived and navigated by those targeted, it moves beyond abstract, institutional framings to reveal the situated realities of these interventions. This shift from a disembodied policy discourse to a phenomenological perspective that exposes what border externalisation concretely entails for people on the move. In doing so, the chapter disrupts reductive narratives that cast border crossers either as passive victims or heroes, instead highlighting the complexity of their choices, the contradictions and the everyday enactments of agency through which they negotiate constrained circumstances. By centring personal stories, this approach challenges homogenising portrayals of black mobility as a faceless mass, instead highlighting the diverse subjectivities, strategies, and experiences of individuals, showing that no single narrative can capture the complexity of movement and its social, political, and embodied dimensions. Besides, taking into account the many interrupted trajectories complicates the idea of framing black mobility solely as migration to Europe. Such an understanding imposes a rigid framework that largely overlooks that individuals are instead in search of opportunities and might stop or change their journeys whenever and wherever these may arise. Second, while a thorough analysis of smuggling networks goes beyond the scope of this work, by focusing on the figure of the smuggler from the perspective of both people on the move and smugglers themselves, the chapter nuances dominant representations that portray smugglers as uniformly exploitative villains and migrants as powerless victims. While scams or financial deceit are very frequently mentioned in people's accounts, and reports of physical or psychological violence by smugglers do exist, they are not pervasive and are usually linked to specific circumstances. Most accounts of violence reported by people on the move are not linked to smuggling itself, but to encounters with violent border authorities, state actors, and non-state armed groups: police who beat or abandon travellers in the desert, the Libyan so-called coast guard that imprisons, tortures, and kills, and armed groups operating in desert and forested border areas across North Africa who rob and kidnap travellers. Therefore, rather than viewing violence as the product of individual smugglers alone, it should be understood as part of a continuum of border violence, rooted in the structural harms and precarity generated by the border regime. More commonly, testimonies of engagement with smugglers reveal both the ambivalence of these interactions,

and the agency of people on the move in interacting with them. Paradoxically, many interlocutors think of smugglers *not* as perpetrators of violence, but as actors providing relative protection and security, even if limited, against the diffuse and systemic violence of border regimes. Seen this way, involvement in smuggling as a means of facilitating movement becomes part of a broader continuum of mobility practice through which people on the move reinterpret, contest, and reshape state-imposed categories of illegality and belonging, making it a political act of survival within the necropolitical border regime.

Chapter VI: Forced Return and Im/mobility

“The problem is not leaving, it’s coming back,” Malick jokes, as he sweeps the hair clippings of his last customer off the floor. I meet him in his barbershop located in a village in the region of Thiès, where we sit chatting during the brief moments between clients. He wears a faded cap and a t-shirt displaying the Barça logo, his favourite football team, he mentions with pride saying he never misses a match. Our conversation weaves in and out, punctuated by the buzzing sound of the machine as he shaves a fresh haircut on his next client, and the background noise of a football match playing on the small, old TV mounted on the wall. During our conversation, Malick recounts the many backdoors he had taken in his multiple attempts to reach Europe, through the desert, across borders, through forests and checkpoints. His last attempt was in 2019 when he was refouled from Morocco. At the time, Senegal was in the midst of a presidential election, with then President Macky Sall running for a second term. “When the Moroccans caught us and put us in prison,” Malick says, “someone came and told us, ‘You, the Senegalese, Macky Sall, your President, has said that you will not go anywhere’.” Malick and his friends were relieved. Forced returns are always politically delicate in Senegal, where repatriations are unpopular and rarely carried out openly during election season. Already during the first repatriation of Senegalese from the Canary Islands in 2006, President Abdoulaye Wade faced open criticism from both the opposition and public protests, which widely perceived repatriations as humiliating and shameful. If deportation was not an option, Malick and his friends hoped they would eventually be released and they would try again. This time, through the fence at Melilla, he says. Yet their relief was short-lived. A few weeks later, after Macky Sall secured his re-election, the prison guard returned with a different message: “Your President needs you in Senegal.” Not long after, buses were organised, and they were all sent back. Once back in Senegal, with little support for his reintegration, Malick could not bring himself to return to his village. The thought of facing his family without having

“made it” felt unbearable. He had left with their blessing and much of their savings, money they had scraped together by selling family belongings to support his journey. Returning empty-handed, he says, would only bring shame. So instead, Malick chose to stay in Dakar, trying to delay the moment of return and thinking about his next steps in the anonymity of the city. He explains he needed time alone to prepare himself for the looks from others in the village and the whispers of those who would say: “Look at him! He left his family and went to Morocco, only to return like this!”

This chapter analyses forced return as a critical site in the colonial encounter between border externalisation and people’s movement. It advances a grounded understanding of return not as an endpoint, but as a space of rupture, continuation, and negotiation where the will to move persists despite enforced im/mobility. Forced returns are not understood simply as logistical outcomes of deportation policies, but as moments in which mobility is not only suspended, but also redirected and reimagined. Drawing on ethnographic narratives of people forcibly sent back while on their way to Europe, or once already in Europe, this chapter explores how mobility practice is simultaneously embodied, political, and (re)imagined. As an embodied practice, mobility encompasses the physical and psychological toll exerted by forced return: the exhaustion, trauma, and stigmatisation inscribed on the bodies and minds of returnees. As a political practice, it reveals how returnees assert agency by resisting and negotiating the constraints imposed by border externalisation, transforming experiences of deportation into acts of resilience and reappropriation. Finally, mobility as (re)imagined practice highlights the ongoing capacity of returnees to envision alternative futures and sustain desires for movement despite structural barriers, illustrating that return does not foreclose mobility but instead reconfigures its possibilities in new ways.

As illustrated by Malick’s story, returns, whether forced or assisted, have become a central instrument for managing borders, facilitated through agreements between countries of so-called origin, transit and arrival. While forced return traditionally refers to the physical deportation of individuals from one country to their country of citizenship by state authorities or their agents (Lemberg Pedersen 2022), in this chapter the concept is expanded to include returns that occur without direct coercion. These include returns facilitated by IOM or undertaken autonomously under circumstances that leave individuals with little real choice but to go back. Even when not forcibly removed, the returns examined here are shaped by the constraints of border externalisation

and the deliberate politics of exhaustion imposed on people on the move (Welander 2020).

In the Senegalese context, scholars have explored notions of return among Senegalese men (Pian 2006; Flahaux 2021; Rodriguez 2023; Barone 2024), often through a gendered lens (Sinatti 2014; Strijbosch, Mazzucato & Brunotte 2023; Strijbosch & Mazzucato 2024). Another strand of research has highlighted how returnees mobilise their experiences for personal and social capital, particularly by engaging with the migration-development industry through IOM campaigns (Vammen 2021; Schenetti & Mazzucato 2024) and by creating returnee associations (Pian 2011). Additionally, some have examined how returnees are framed as contributors to development (Diatta & Mbow 1999; Sinatti 2022). This chapter contributes to these ongoing debates on border externalisation and forced return in at least two ways. First, it conceptualises forced return as a complex and multifaceted encounter with border externalisation, highlighting both the immediate confrontation with deportation regimes and the longer-term consequences that unfold after return. This approach moves beyond treating return as a discrete event, instead framing it as an ongoing process marked by rupture, negotiation, and adaptation within broader systems of racialised control and exclusion. Second, by centring women's stories alongside those of men, something largely overlooked in the Senegalese context, I expand the analysis to reveal the gendered dimensions of forced return and mobility.

The first part of this chapter examines forced returns from African soil, highlighting both the violence of physical removal and the role of IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs. The second part shifts focus to forced returns from Europe, emphasising the physical and administrative violence experienced during deportation and upon arrival in Senegal, where return is framed as a moralising and self-reliance experience, detached from socio-cultural and economic dynamics and long-lasting trauma. Finally, the third part investigates what happens *after* border externalisation, analysing how forced returns shape reintegration within families and communities and how some people manage to harness forced returns as an opportunity.

Forced Returns from Africa

As shown in Chapter V, most journeys northward are cut short, and people are forcibly returned through four main mechanisms. Some are caught while trying to cross from Morocco into Spain and are often detained in Moroccan prisons before being sent back. Others are forcibly removed from Mauritania after being intercepted at sea or before departure. Some are intercepted and returned by the Senegalese navy while still en route, sometimes with support from EU border agents like the Spanish Guardia Civil. Lastly, some individuals, trapped in countries such as Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, or Libya and unable to continue their journey, chose to return, either through the IOM's voluntary return programs, or by making their way back independently. These returns are often marked by both physical and psychological violence. People endure mistreatment by police, harsh detention conditions, and aggressive interrogations aimed at identifying those who organised their journeys. Mobility is lived as an embodied practice also through humiliation, abandonment and neglect by states and organisations like BAOS (Office for Reception, Orientation, and Monitoring) or IOM. Yet, despite these severe constraints, mobility also remains a political practice, where people always find ways to navigate, resist, and assert their agency within these oppressive structures.

Returned and Rejected: State Power, Violence, and Stigma

People who travel through the Atlantic backdoor are often forcibly returned by the Mauritanian or Moroccan authorities, or directly by the Senegalese Navy. These forced returns frequently mark the beginning of a continuum of violence: arbitrary detention, physical abuse and abandonment. Samba, a man in his thirties from a village in the Tambacounda region, attempted the journey multiple times. On one occasion, Mauritanian police arrested him in a house in Nouadhibou where he and several others were staying as they waited for the moment of departure. He was held in prison for nearly a year. "It was very hard. It was exhausting over there," he recalls. "They treat you like someone who has killed a person, like a criminal, even though you've done nothing wrong." He described beatings, sleeplessness, and constant hunger: "You don't sleep, you don't eat. It's terrible. They mistreat you." When he was finally released, authorities drove him and fellow travellers close to the

Senegalese border and dropped them there. Upon arrival in Rosso, there was no reception, no support, just the dusty roads:

“We had nothing, no clothes, no food, no water, not even a single franc to make the journey home. We didn’t even have shoes to walk in because we had been stripped of everything... There was no one waiting for us in Rosso, no Senegalese authorities, no government officials, no organisations. They just abandoned us at the border like that.”

He eventually contacted his wife, who scraped together enough money to help him return.

While Samba was forcibly returned through Rosso by Mauritanian authorities, Daouda, Assane, and Modou were intercepted at sea by the Moroccan navy. Once apprehended, they were first brought to a Moroccan detention center, where they spent fifteen days in dire conditions:

“There were sick people among us. But the Moroccans did nothing. They didn’t even look at them. They would just come and leave. They gave us small pieces of bread and a little bit of water.”

Eventually, they were loaded onto buses and taken all the way back to Rosso, transported across borders without any formal process or assistance on arrival. When they got off the bus in Rosso, the Senegalese police were already there to interrogate them, as Assane explains:

“They didn’t even ask how we were, or what had happened! They just started asking questions aggressively, about who organised the trip, who took our money etc. It was aggressive, like we had committed a crime.”

For them, the most painful part was not the detention in Morocco, but the moment of being made to feel alien at home, as Daouda explains:

“The way they talked to us, it was as if migrating is something bad, as if we were criminals. Some of us even said that foreigners treat us better... In Morocco, we could move around, we could eat. If I asked for sugar, they gave it to me. But in Senegal, they control you, even though you were born here. Personally, it struck me, because they talk to you aggressively as soon as you arrive in Senegal, your own country.”

It was not only the police who made them feel unwelcome, but also the staring, judging gaze of ordinary people. In Rosso, the sense of rejection became particularly palpable:

“In Rosso, it’s a bit complicated... People, ordinary civilians, film you with their phones. Because if you’re Senegalese and migrating... people are very curious to see the migrants who return.”

The gaze of others was not neutral. “Some look at you positively,” he continues, explaining that a few people had words of encouragement for them. However, the dominant feeling was one of failure laid bare for public consumption, as “most look at you negatively.” The humiliation deepened upon arrival in Saint-Louis. Daouda recalled being herded into a bus without being told a word as to where they were directed and then dropped into a restaurant room by authorities: “We were hungry, thinking they would give us something to eat. But they told us no, they were going to give us 5,000²⁵ CFA each to return home.”

The sum was not enough to reach their village, so they started walking toward the transport garage, trying to flag down cars:

“There was a car with five seats, and only two people inside. They were Senegalese like us, so we made them sign to stop. They were going to the same garage, but they didn’t want to take us there. They knew we were migrants... Often, when you return, you think that your country does not love you.”

This experience of stigma and exclusion on land mirrors the violence and dehumanisation faced by those apprehended at sea. As recounted in Chapter V, Bocar, Saliou, Lamine, and Ndongo were first intercepted by the Spanish Guardia Civil in an encounter already marked by violence and intimidation. Yet, their experience was far from over. After a tense handover involving Mauritanian authorities, they were transferred to a Senegalese navy boat, who carried out their forced return. This return, like the ones described above, was characterised not only by physical violence, but also by a sustained dehumanisation that cast them as criminals. Their vivid account captures the harshness of this transfer: the Senegalese navy arrived with large vessels while the Spanish used small inflatable boats to ferry them over. Before they even disembarked, Bocar explains, a Senegalese navy officer boarded their boat and

²⁵ Approximately 7€

stared at them “with open disgust, as if we were worthless”. Once aboard, the officers’ treatment grew increasingly degrading:

“The first thing they asked us was whether we had eaten on the Spanish vessel because they hoped we would say yes. *Billaahi, Wallaahi, Tallaahi!* We said no, and they made *sonbi*, a kind of rice broth, but it doesn’t stay in your stomach; you have to go to the toilet right away!”

Since the broth was not enough for everyone, those who had not eaten received hard, stale bread. “But some refused to eat because it was really disgusting,” Bocar says. On top of that, their physical hardships were compounded by forced confinement in painful squatting positions for hours. Anyone attempting to stand was harshly ordered to sit back down: “If anyone tried to stand because they couldn’t bear the position any longer, the officers would shout at them to sit back down, even if they were cramping.”

In that position and with barely any food in their stomach, they were left exposed to rain for over two hours. By late afternoon, they finally reached Dakar where police escorted them to a station for questioning. The interrogation focused on identifying the journey’s captain and organisers. Some people in the group were arrested under suspicion of coordinating the trip and were imprisoned. During this process, they recall being introduced to officers from BAOS (Office for Reception, Orientation, and Monitoring), a Senegalese body tasked with assisting returnees through reintegration programs funded by the EU. However, despite initial promises to support them, contact was never made again:

“The people from BAOS took our numbers and said they would call us to help us get into programs... But it was a lie. We also told them we didn’t have shoes, we were hungry, and we did not have money to go back home. The BAOS agents returned that night and brought some biscuits. After that, we walked bare feet from the Port of Dakar to the station in Pikine [around 12 km]. After that, we never heard from the BAOS people again.”

These stories show that forced return is not the end of mobility, but an integral part of its embodied practice. These are not neutral acts of repatriation, but punitive responses to unauthorised movement, enacted through physical violence, detention, public humiliation, and abandonment. The beatings, forced squatting, hunger, and criminalising interrogations they endured expose

how reverse mobility, like outward migration, is shaped by violence inscribed on the body.

IOM Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration

While some journeys were interrupted by forced return at the hands of state authorities, the vast majority of people I met had not experienced return in this formal, state-enforced sense. Rather, they eventually found themselves stranded, caught in the harsh in-betweens of Niger, Libya, Tunisia or Morocco, trapped in conditions of suffering and immobility, unable to advance toward Europe or go back home. This stuckness, often prolonged and shaped by exhaustion, injury, and despair, became its own form of containment. In the face of this impasse, some chose to return to Senegal through the IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programs, initiatives that offer migrants the possibility to return to their countries of origin in exchange for reintegration support, such as travel assistance and financial aid intended to help them restart their lives. While framed as voluntary, these returns often occurred under conditions so constrained that the notion of free choice becomes difficult to sustain. One of the clearest examples of this emerges from the experiences of people detained in Libyan prisons, where, as shown in the dire account of Habib in Chapter V, survival itself becomes a daily struggle. In such contexts, the decision to return is not made freely but under extreme duress, where individuals are often willing to accept anything just to escape.

This constraint becomes visible in the tactical decisions some make while negotiating these systems. Some of my interlocutors, for instance, recounted how they pretended to be from The Gambia when IOM visited their prison as part of a repatriation initiative for Gambian nationals. By posing as nationals of another country, they were able to secure passage out of Libya and eventually return to Senegal. Pathé was among those who employed this strategy. In his thirties and from a village in the Tambacounda region, he comes from a family of travellers and had long imagined mobility as part of his inheritance. Following in his father's footsteps, he left for Libya with the intention of continuing to Europe. He spent years in Libya, moving between poorly paid jobs in the informal sector and detention. Each time he attempted to cross, he failed. Eventually, after yet another arrest, he found himself back in prison sick, exhausted, broke, and no longer able to ask his family for help. When IOM visited the prison to organise repatriations for Gambians, he made

a calculated move: “Gambia and Senegal are so close, we speak the same language. So I said I was Gambian.”

With no documents to disprove his claim, IOM accepted him into the program and flew him to Gambia. From there, he identified himself as Senegalese and was referred to IOM Senegal. Upon return, he received 500,000²⁶ CFA from IOM, which he used to buy cattle and attempt reintegration. “But that money barely gets you one cow. It wasn’t enough for me.” He was still stuck, just in a different way. “You see the conditions I’m in now? If it’s not me migrating again, it will be someone else in my family,” he adds, gesturing towards the desolate piece of land in the middle of Senegal where he has his family live in very precarious conditions, with no electricity or water. Many of those I met who returned through AVRR programs expressed similar dissatisfaction, as these programs largely overlook the economic and social burdens that shape return. Migrants often accumulate significant debt during their journey, borrowing money, selling land, or depleting family resources to finance their mobility. Upon return, they are reinserted into complex family dynamics marked by heightened expectations, economic strain, and new forms of dependency. In this context, the modest financial assistance offered through AVRR rarely supports genuine reintegration. Instead, it may provide only short-term relief for the household or, as in Pathé’s case, become a stepping stone for renewed mobility: used to contemplate, prepare for, or even directly fund another attempt to leave.

The strategic choice to engage with the AVRR program amid stuckness is also echoed in Adjji’s story. Married young to an abusive and violent husband and mother of two, she eventually decided to leave her village in the Kolda region to attempt crossing the Mediterranean via Libya. During her journey, she often heard migrants talking about IOM as an organisation that helps people return home when circumstances become unbearable. Although she did not pay much attention at the time, she carefully remembered the name, sensing it might be useful in the future. After spending several years in Libya working as a housemaid, she found herself trapped in life-threatening conditions due to the ongoing civil war and unable to continue moving forward. Without the financial means to safely return all the way to Senegal, she made her way back from Libya to an IOM camp in Niger. She reasoned that with IOM’s assistance, her journey home would be safer, funded, and that she would receive some financial support upon arrival:

²⁶ Approximately 760€

“I stayed at IOM camp for almost two weeks. There were people from all nationalities. Then they called your embassy to confirm your nationality, and after that, you signed a paper to be able to return. Life at the IOM camp wasn’t too bad to be honest; at least we were safe and taken care of. The only problem was the food. It was really terrible, sometimes with bugs.”

Upon returning, Adjì also received 500,000 CFA, which she used to open a small tailoring stall in Kolda. Unlike Pathé, who expressed deep dissatisfaction with the support provided, Adjì is more appreciative. She shows me with pride the fabrics she sells, while explaining that, as a woman, her options would have been extremely limited without this financial aid, likely reduced to remarrying, something that she is not willing to accept. While she acknowledged that the assistance was not sufficient to build lasting stability, and while she tells me her two sons are still with the father’s family, as she is unable to support them, she nonetheless views AVRR as a meaningful stepping stone. Similarly to Pathé, even though her decision to return was shaped by constrained circumstances, Adjì demonstrated strategic agency in navigating her stuckness by deliberately choosing to go through AVRR, calculating that, as a woman, this path offered a safer and more viable return compared to other alternatives.

These experiences reveal how return through AVRR is not outside the violence of the border regime, but entangled within it. Pathé and Adjì’s stories illustrate how AVRR extends the border’s reach by managing return as a form of soft control, where the illusion of voluntariness conceals the coercive conditions under which many choose to go back. These returns are shaped by conditions produced through border externalisation, such as exhaustion, despair, and the impossibility of moving forward, while the support offered upon return remains minimal, short-term, and often inadequate. Within this constrained context, the stories of Pathé and Adjì reveal mobility practice in force returns as both embodied and political. As an embodied practice, mobility is felt through the physical toll of repeated crossings, the fatigue of detention, and the lasting impact of violence that ultimately pushes them to return. At the same time, mobility is political in the tactics and decisions they use to assert agency by deliberately choosing to AVRR, even if within limited options.

Force Returns From Europe

While most of the people I met never reached Europe and were instead forcibly returned within Africa, a minority did make it, either through the backdoors discussed in Chapter V, by overstaying temporary work visas, or via family reunification. Their length of stay in Europe varied widely, from as little as one month (such as those deported from the Canary Islands in 2006) to over 20 years, often moving between Italy, Spain, France, and Germany. Their forced returns were usually tied to unauthorised entry, undocumented status, or rejected asylum claims, sometimes compounded by minor criminal offenses such as fare evasion, altercations with police, or drug-related charges. In this section, I recount a forced return from Germany in spring 2023, which I followed closely through my involvement with Boza Fii, a local organisation that voluntarily assists people forcibly returned from Europe. This narrative draws on my fieldwork diary as I accompanied returnees during the immediate phase of their return.

Day 1 of Forced Return – At the Airport

Wednesday morning, May 3rd, 2023, starts slowly at Boza Fii's office as we work on a funding application for one of the organisation's upcoming events. While we chat casually, Saliou, the founder and president of Boza Fii, receives a call from a friend activist in Germany who volunteers with the Munich Refugee Council, assisting migrants pending deportation. She informs him about the forced return of three Senegalese men from Germany, set to arrive on a charter flight that very day. "Hurry up, we need to go!" Saliou says, telling me that the application can wait. We hop on a taxi and immediately rush to the airport. There, we wait for a couple of hours, perched on low wooden stools and sharing a steaming bowl of *mafé*, a thick, savory stew of slow-cooked meat in a rich peanut sauce, with some airport workers. Between spoonfuls, we explain what has brought us here. Some of the workers look puzzled, unfamiliar with the procedures of forced returns, while others nod knowingly and suggest we try the secondary doors. Forced returns, they explain, are too sensitive to pass through the main arrival gates. Instead, returnees are discreetly ushered in through back entrances, hidden from the eyes of ordinary travellers.

As we finish our lunch, the time has already come when the flights should have landed. We make our way toward a cluster of nearly deserted buildings about a kilometre from the main terminal. The quiet there is striking, broken only by the occasional hum of a passing vehicle. Yet the silence is offset by a conspicuous presence of police and military personnel stationed around the area. Inside the building, surrounded by police, are thirteen people burdened with heavy clothing, backpacks, and some boxes. With the sun beating down in temperatures well above thirty degrees, their layers of jackets and sweaters make them look distinctly out of place, bodies dressed for another climate, suddenly dropped into the heat of Dakar. One man in a military uniform approaches us with an aggressive demeanour. It is clear he does not want us to enter the building. "Who are you? What are you doing here? Who sent you?" he asks. After some discussion, Saliou manages to convince him that we are here to welcome the returnees, and the policeman instructs us to wait outside. Eventually, the thirteen people inside are ushered out and left on the highway just outside the airport. The police disperse without a word. No one waits to receive them, no transport is arranged to take them onward, and no questions are asked about their well-being or whether they even have a home to return to that night. The thirteen men are instructed to clear the area and move to a parking area just in front of the terminal building. Some smoke nervously, others make phone calls, others start walking toward the highway, and some hail taxis. "They abandon us like dogs on the highway," one of the young men comments bitterly, as he walks towards the highway. Saliou tries to approach some of them to ask if they need any support, but most look at him with suspicion and are reluctant to engage in any conversation. This is hardly surprising, given that in less than 24 hours, they were catapulted from a life in Germany back to Senegal, disoriented and stripped of any sense of agency. One of them says that the German police on the flight gave them information about where to go once in Senegal if they need a place to stay. He hands over the flyer of a project for returnees funded by the German Agency for Development Cooperation (GIZ). However, the information is outdated, as the centre referred to in the flyer was no longer in operation at that time.

As people slowly start to leave, three of them, Henri, Cherif, and Ismail remain in the parking spot, having nowhere to go. Henri and Cherif are tired and angry. They say that most of the people on the flight were apprehended the day before on the street, imprisoned without a phone while awaiting deportation. They were unable to alert anyone or retrieve their belongings of a lifetime in Germany. Henri shows us his small backpack, helplessly holding it as if it contains his entire life. He, like others, wears heavy clothing, a winter jacket

and a pair of boots, unprepared for the heat of Senegal. He says he was not even allowed to go back home to change and wear lighter clothes. He could not retrieve any of his money either, and arrived in Dakar with nothing more than the few euros he had the morning he was apprehended. He ensures that back in Germany he has a few thousand euros he managed to save from his work. He seems worried about what will happen to his savings now that he is in Senegal with no possibility of returning, and asks whether we can lend him a phone to contact a friend of his in Germany, so he can arrange to send him some money. While smoking the third cigarette since he landed, Henri complains that the journey back was highly degrading:

“They handcuffed me, even though I said I am calm, I am not going to do anything. There were two policemen with me, as if I were a criminal. I did not do anything, I swear, why are they treating me like this? I told them they did not have to do that, in perfect German! It is hard, I have done nothing wrong, I have stolen nothing...”

Cherif, who remained noticeably calmer, explains that he managed to persuade the police not to shackle him. “They even wanted to come with me into the toilet when I needed to pee,” he recounts with disbelief, “but I told them, no way I will allow you in!” He adds that his almost perfect German helped him convince them he posed no threat. While Henri and Cherif talk, Ismail remains on the side, looking lost and confused when people speak to him in Wolof or French. His body, too, seems caught in an unnatural posture: his back bent slightly forward, his head dangling to one side, his eyes half-closed, as if he cannot quite summon the strength to stand upright again. Saliou calls me over, asking me to try speaking to him in English, as his travel companions say he is from Sierra Leone. I smile, trying to convey friendliness despite the situation, and ask how he was feeling. Ismail does not seem responsive; he looks away and mumbles words I cannot fully understand. Among the jumble, I catch some words in Italian. “*Parli italiano?*” I ask. He finally looks at me and manages a faint smile.

Ismail, in his middle 30’s left Senegal when he was a minor and has never returned since. He spent his adolescence and first adulthood in Italy, where he moved on a visa to join his father, who had moved there to work in the late 1980s. After some conflicts with his father and issues with the police, Ismail decided to try his luck in Germany, where he spent several years working undocumented before ending up in a psychiatric clinic in circumstances he does not fully disclose. The day before the forced return, he was picked up by the police in the clinic where he had been heavily medicated for months, he

does not remember how many, as his memories are fragmented and clouded. He does recall that, before leaving the clinic escorted by two German police officers, he was agitated and was injected with some medication to calm him down. The medication clearly has a heavy effect on him, as he can barely stand and his speech is unclear. Ismail has no medical records with him, only a half-used blister of pills he says he needs to take twice a day, which will not even last a week. He shares that, upon arrival in Dakar, despite having a safe-conduct from the Senegalese authorities who had identified him in Germany, the local police considered sending him back. Since he did not speak any Wolof, French or any other of the languages spoken in Senegal, they believed they had made a mistake and that he was not actually Senegalese, maybe from Sierra Leone or other places. Despite its evident state of physical and mental alteration, Ismail is left on the verge of the highway like all the others, with nowhere to go. He does not have a phone and cannot remember any phone number. He says his mind is clouded. Cherif and Henri patiently wait for us to talk to Ismail. They have family in Dakar but are not ready to go back just yet. Their families do not know about their forced return, and they need time to process what has happened before reaching out to their families. For the time being they will all be hosted by Saliou's.

Day 2 of Forced Return – At the Hospital

Ismail seems a bit better today after a long sleep, and we manage to talk. Probably the effects of the medication that was administered to calm him before departure have faded. Now, he needs to figure out his health situation, as he says that sometimes he cannot feel well without his medicines. We bring him to the public hospital and manage to get an appointment with a psychiatrist. He does not speak any French or Wolof, so he needs help with the translation from Italian. The doctor says the medications he was taking in Germany are not available in Senegal. Besides, without any medical record, it is difficult to get a clear picture of his health situation, and he does not feel he can prescribe new medications. He just prescribes some sedatives to be used only in case of need and sleeping pills to help him sleep at night.

During the second day, Ismail's memory slowly starts to come back. He recalls that his mother lives somewhere in Senegal, though he has lost contact with her since his stay in the clinic in Germany. As he sifts through his few belongings in his backpack, Ismail finds a piece of paper with a number scrawled on it. It is his father's, who lives in Italy. He asks us to make the call with him, expressing a deep fear of speaking to his father alone. When we call,

his father refuses to speak with him in Italian, insisting he will only talk to Ismail once “he remembers his own language.” After a tense exchange, his father finally provides Ismail’s mother’s phone number. She lives in a remote village in the Tambacounda region. We attempt to reach her, but communication with her proves difficult. She only speaks Pular, a language Ismail has also forgotten. With some help, Ismail is finally able to arrange a visit for her in a month. Before that, he says, he needs to prepare himself mentally. Not only is his mother unaware of his forced return, leaving him with the burden of a difficult conversation in a language he barely remembers, but she also lives in a remote village in a deeply religious and conservative area where Ismail knows he will struggle to readjust. After life in Berlin, he says, returning to a place where even smoking a cigarette or drinking a beer is frowned upon, and where he expects to be met with judgment and suspicion, feels almost impossible. “I do not know how I will survive here,” he tells me in Italian not to be understood, “people are all weird, they eat strange, and they have strange habits. You know, they say I am an African, sure I am black, but I am not like them and I am used to another life.”

Day 3 of Forced Return – At the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad

People who are forcibly returned from Europe have a right to assistance, as the mechanisms of forced returns allocate funds and projects meant to facilitate reintegration into Senegal. Yet, for Ismail, Henri, and Cherif, along with the others forcibly returned alongside them, these promises remain distant echoes. No one awaited them at the airport. No one directed them toward reintegration programs. No one offered psychological or financial support. They arrived with nothing but the backpacks they had been allowed to carry. It is early morning when we arrive at the Ministry of Senegalese Abroad to seek assistance. When we explain the situation, we are bounced from one office to another before finally being told to wait in a small room. A man, without introduction, greets Ismail, Henri, and Cherif with a remark that immediately sets the tone: “Next time you come to an administration, you will wear decent clothes.” The irony is sharp as they had been deported with barely more than the clothes on their backs.

The waiting room is modestly furnished with two armchairs and a sofa. In front of us, a large screen plays a video on loop. It tells the story of Omar, a returnee who, according to the script, transformed his failed migration into a success story. His voiceover recounts his journey:

“I had to support my parents. I left Senegal for Morocco, hoping to reach Europe. In Morocco, I found a program by the Senegalese state offering training for those who wished to return. I engaged in an aquaculture and fish farming project. I was trained so I could bring these ideas back home. I am proud of having returned, because I am creating jobs and contributing to my country’s development.”

The story in the video seeks not just to inform but also to moralise. Return is framed as an entrepreneurial opportunity, rather than a rupture, and an individual choice, rather than one imposed by states and border regimes. By the third repetition of Omar’s story, we are finally called in. A woman takes their names, promising to enroll them in a reintegration program. The discussion begins with long-winded reassurances. But Henri, increasingly agitated, interrupts:

“Why did the Senegalese state come to identify us for deportation? The deportation itself is painful, but what hurts most is that my own brothers and sisters handed me over!”

The official across from him expresses remorse that feels genuine. He claims they were not informed about the forced return and that he is sorry no one was at the airport to assist them. Yet, Henri does not let this pass. “Since it is the government that signs the travel permits for our return, it is difficult to believe you didn’t know” he says with a tone of defiance. Attempting to pacify the situation that is getting heated, another official steps in. There is no formal agreement on returns with Germany, he insists, but the EU pressures many states, including Senegal, to accept back their nationals. “Although officially the Senegalese state says yes to returns from Germany, in reality, we do the bare minimum to assist with returns,” he says with a reassuring tone, “our instructions from above are not to facilitate any repatriations, not to recognise returnees, not to issue safe-conducts.” Henri remains unconvinced and insists:

“My problem isn’t deportation itself, but knowing I was deported by my own country. By my own people. It was Senegalese that came to identify and remove us. There were Turks, Syrians, Mexicans in Germany, but we were deported because we are black. And Senegalese migrants are a minority in Germany!”

The civil servant hesitates but quickly recovers, putting an end to the conversation. “I understand your frustration,” he says, “but Europeans have

their own laws. If you stay there without authorisation, there's little we can do."

The conversation continues, shifting from justifications for Senegal's involvement in forced returns to attempts at showcasing the government's role in the reintegration process. Eventually, they are handed a brochure about a reintegration program financed under the EUTF on "strengthening inclusive migration governance to enhance the synergy between migration and development." Yet, the program ended in February 2022. The official assures them that they will not be abandoned: the Senegalese government, he claims, is committed to helping returnees and supporting them at all phases of their reintegration. At the end of the meeting, he hands each of them 50,000²⁷ CFA, offering a final reassurance: "This is not the end of the world. You are home now, and we will take care of you."

Day 4 of Forced Return: At the National Agency for Youth Employment

During the visit to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Senegalese Abroad, it was suggested that Ismail, Henri, and Cherif also stop by the National Agency for Employment (ANJEP). The agency, funded by the EU, IOM, and the UN, is responsible for offering both short- and long-term employment opportunities for returnees. As we step inside, the space strikes me with its clean, minimalist design, almost IKEA-like, with pale wood desks, neatly arranged chairs, and a large round table dominating the centre of the room. We take our seats on one side of the table while the adviser, a man in his forties dressed in a suit jacket and a shirt, positions himself across from us and smiles. Over the next two hours, Ismail, Henri, and Cherif are guided through a range of potential opportunities and support services. The adviser gestures to printed folders, explaining how they can enhance their CVs, draft business plans, and acquire entrepreneurial skills. Throughout, Ismail, Henri and Cherif listen quietly, occasionally nodding, their eyes flicking between the papers and one another. The adviser keeps talking to them as if they are job-seekers fresh out of university. Given their circumstances, this language of self-reliance and entrepreneurship feels deeply out of place for people who have just endured the trauma of forced return. Yet, the adviser seems oblivious to this disconnect, all smiles and professional cadence, continuing to frame the programs as opportunities for anyone, returnees or Senegalese more broadly. "Otherwise, Senegalese take the desert route and the boats," he says with irony and stifling

²⁷ Approximately 76€

a laugh, “we want to be inclusive and prevent that. That’s why we also assist people who were never migrants but have decided to remain here.”

As he continues his speech almost uninterrupted, his words seem to carry the implicit assumption that return is a choice. This does not sit well with Henri as his expression hardens: “We didn’t choose to return, sir. We were brought back by force,” he says. A tense silence follows. The adviser hesitates for a moment, then continues with his presentation of the agency’s programs, smiling slightly and ignoring any hint of provocation. After nearly an hour of talking, he tells us, again with a smile, that the reintegration project is in a transitional phase: “At the moment, the funding has run out, so there are unfortunately no specific financial assistance programs for returnees right now.” The advisor takes their names and numbers and promises to connect them with skill-building and training opportunities in Dakar. As they prepare to leave, he offers one last advice: “Take your time to reflect on your business plan. It’s important to be clear about what you want to do.” Ismail, who struggles to understand any French, looks at me and asks if he understood correctly: “So basically after all this talk he is telling us that there are no projects or money for us, right? It is all bullshit!”

Discouraged, Henri, Cherif, and Ismail return to Saliou’s place. They stayed there for varying lengths of time before feeling ready to reunite with their families. Eventually, they did receive some training and funding from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) for their reintegration. Almost one year after his return, Ismail sent me a picture of some construction materials and a motorbike he was able to buy with this help. However, similar to support by IOM, the funding was ultimately short-lived and insufficient. In Senegal, where unemployment is widespread and much of the labour market is dominated by informal and insecure jobs, participation in training workshops or small financing seldom, if ever, translate into stable employment opportunities. As of last time I heard from them, both Ismail and Henri were already considering ways to return to Europe.

This story of forced return from Europe illustrates how the encounter between unauthorised mobility and the mechanisms of border externalisation generates a form of involuntary and backward mobility, that is deeply embodied, both physically and affectively. Return from Europe is shaped by deception, fear, anger, and by the violence of deportation itself: people are criminalised, handcuffed, drugged, denied medical care, and treated as threats. Once back in Senegal, they are equally met with indifference, mirroring the experience of those returned through Rosso. Authorities offer vague promises and little

support, often worsening their trauma through delays, neglect, or total inaction. Reintegration programs, shaped by neoliberal and entrepreneurial logics, deepen this violence by framing return as a personal responsibility, something to fix with the right “skills”, the right “CV” or “training.” This erases the structural and political forces behind irregular migration and ignores the emotional and social toll of forced return. In this context, deported individuals experience mobility as an embodied practice not only through the physical pain of removal, but also through the institutional neglect that follows.

After Border Externalisation

If movement toward Europe can signify social ascent, as captured in the Wolof concept of *kaaw*, which connotes climbing or rising in status, as discussed in Chapter IV, then forced return marks a painful reversal of that trajectory, experienced by many as a profound fall. This fall is deeply embodied and socially felt: returnees speak of shame, loss of dignity and unfulfilled expectations, as they re-enter communities where their journey had once symbolised hope and ambition. The unfulfilled promise of *kaaw* renders return not just a physical displacement, but a rupture in social value, kin expectations, and self-perception. Additionally, many have invested significant financial resources, most often coming from their families. The burden of financial loss compounds the trauma of deportation, as people are forced to reconcile their shattered dreams of Europe with the economic hardship they find their families in, which they feel they have actively contributed to.

This final section examines post-deportation experiences through three interconnected lenses of mobility. First, it considers mobility as an embodied practice, analysing the long-term psychological and emotional consequences of forced return, including trauma, stigma, and struggles with reintegration. These challenges are also gendered, as both men and women face these challenges, albeit in different ways. Second, it explores mobility as an imagined practice, focusing on how returnees reimagine their futures, whether by attempting migration again or by reshaping their aspirations and strategies for success within their new realities. Finally, it looks at how people use their mobility experiences to redefine success not through renewed mobility, but by drawing on their past movement to create alternative livelihoods. As such, mobility as a political practice is shown in how deported individuals carve out spaces of resistance against the long-term pressures of return, challenging the

narratives of failure imposed upon them and negotiating new ways to assert autonomy.

The Stigma of “Homecoming” and Gender Expectations

Fodé, a 35-years old man originally from Dakar, migrated to Europe while still in school to join his father in Italy. After tensions with his father and a series of problems with the police, realist to what he describes as “bad companies”, he began moving between different European countries, working in restaurants, construction sites, and agricultural fields to sustain himself. He eventually settled in Germany, where he found more stable employment in an auto factory. But without regularised status, his life remained precarious, and he was eventually deported back to Senegal. I met him through mutual acquaintances some months later, after he had been expelled from Europe, at a moment when he still had not found the courage to return home. Since his return, he has been living with other returnees in a shared house. When we meet, Fodé is initially full of self-assurance, boasting that he “is not like the others,” alluding to those who return home only to fall into depression. He speaks confidently about the skills he has acquired in Europe and his readiness to start a business here in Senegal. Yet, when our conversation turns to his family and the reason he has not yet visited them, his demeanour shifts. The confident posture falters, and he loses his earlier bravado, explaining that many, including himself, do not feel ready to return “home”:

“Your family will ask you a lot of things and pressure you to leave again. When your mom sees you, the first thing she will say is ‘When do you go back?’ And even if you don’t leave again, they will pressure you in other aspects of life, to bring money back home, to marry a woman, to have children etc. That’s when you start seeing people, even the strongest ones, break down. They lose themselves, forgetting how to do the things they once knew. Some relatives rely on you because they think you are rich, while others bombard you with endless questions, asking why you were sent back, even though they don’t really want to hear the answer.”

For Fodé, the pressure comes not only from expectations of success but also from the monetisation of social ties and the weight of what it means to “be in Europe” within the Senegalese imaginary. He ridicules Senegalese people for believing that “everything in Europe is money, money, money,” recounting how many, since his return, have asked him to show pictures of houses, cars,

and other symbols of wealth. “But they do not realise, in Europe people live in tiny apartments, here they live in houses with land,” he says. Yet, in the imagination of the families left behind, Europe continues to be considered as a space of wealth, and their sons or daughters who live there are expected to be able to generate financial support for them. A return, therefore, often signals the end of this support, or at least the end of the hopes tied to it. As Fodé puts it:

“For Senegalese families, no matter how much money you send from Europe, even if you send them a million CFA every month, it’s never enough. And the moment you stop sending it, even if you can’t anymore, you suddenly become the worst person in the world. That’s why, when you return, before even seeing your family, you have to prepare yourself mentally. Then, when you do go see them, you might stay for two days before leaving again, just to get away from all of this pressure.”

His words speak to a wider dynamic of stigma and social alienation that surrounds forced returns. As documented by Schuster and Majidi (2013, 2015), deportation often carries with it a heavy symbolic burden: returnees are perceived as failures not only economically, but also socially, as they are seen as criminals, or even as socially “contaminated.” In Senegal, this stigma is reinforced by dominant discourses from both the state and media, which often depict returnees as troublemakers, liars, or morally suspect individuals who failed abroad (Mbodji 2008). These narratives not only shape how deported individuals are viewed by others, but also how they come to view themselves. For many, like Fodé, the shame and fear of judgment make it difficult to return directly to their families. Some spend weeks or even months in hiding, not informing their relatives of their return, and avoiding public spaces where their presence might raise questions. This echoes what Khosravi (2018) describes as a “post-deportation limbo,” in which individuals feel temporally and socially out of place, suspended between the dream of Europe and the impossible task of reintegration. The sense of disillusionment is often coupled with guilt, not only for having failed to “make it,” but for having let down their families financially, emotionally, and socially.

It is not only the pressure to return and provide that weighs heavily on forcibly returned individuals. As we have seen, for many, the journey to Europe was made possible only through significant sacrifices by their families, some of whom sold land, livestock, jewellery or even went into debt to fund the trip. Return, then, is not experienced as an individual setback but as the collapse of a collective investment. This feeling is especially acute in rural and fishing

communities, where financial precarity and tight-knit social environments magnify both expectations and failures. Lamine, a fisherman from a small village in the region of Thiès, had attempted to reach Europe multiple times by sea. With each journey, he had to ask his family for support, as his earnings from fishing could never cover the full cost. After his most recent failed attempt, he avoided going home for months, preferring instead to leave in the streets, and hide at some friend's house: "For the son of a farmer, it is very difficult to get that kind of money. My family didn't have it, so they borrowed it. They invested in me, believing I would succeed, and my success was their success."

Returning empty-handed felt unbearable, not just because he had failed to reach Spain, but because that failure shattered the trust and resources his family had placed in him:

"I had a complex about looking my parents in the eyes. If I had made it, everything would have changed. I left with a purpose. Coming back home, that purpose didn't come to fruition. Even though I knew it wasn't my fault, I couldn't face them."

Lamine's story illustrates how the pain of return is not reducible to state violence or deportation procedures alone; it is also rooted in the intimate, moral economies of kinship and obligation that frame migration as a family project, where success is measured not just in personal terms, but in the capacity to transform collective futures.

Yet, failure is also perceived at the level of the community. Among returnees, stories of being judged by neighbours or feeling socially rejected are pervasive. Especially within villages or neighbourhoods, people are constantly questioned about why they came back, insistently asked what they did wrong and what they plan to do next, and often dismissed as weak or not committed enough. This social scrutiny was a central theme in my conversation with Abass, a 35-year-old man from Ziguinchor. Abass left Senegal in his early twenties, first trying his luck through Turkey and then reaching Europe via Greece. After some time in Italy and Germany, he was deported due to irregular status. "In the eyes of society, when you return, it is difficult," he tells me as we walk through his new neighbourhood. After having returned, he decided to move somewhere people would not know his story:

"People in Senegal believe that once you arrive in Europe, you have everything. That you just gather money like rain. So when you return,

they ask, 'What now? What are you going to do? Are there any projects?' That's how they judge you. They say, 'He went, now let's see what he brings back.'"

Since his return, Abass has isolated himself. He rents a small room of his own, and lives detached from his extended family, which he visits only once every few months. As many Senegalese families typically live together, especially in villages, this kind of arrangement is quite uncommon, and often frowned upon. Yet, for Abass, this distance is a form of self-preservation. Though he greets neighbours with smiles and exchanges pleasantries, he has cut ties with almost everyone, childhood friends included:

"When I'm in dark moments, in dead ends, I prefer to live through it alone. You know, I got mentally sick when I returned. I had to find a way to live with society without letting them make me feel this way. Here in Senegal, they stigmatise you if you didn't succeed in Europe. I knew this even before I came back. So now, I don't explain myself to anyone. These are my choices, my life. I just say I went on a trip and came back. That's it."

Abass, like many others, is haunted not only by what he experienced in Europe but by what Europe represents at home. It is the enduring image of *tekki*, of success as visible transformation, wealth, and masculinity, that renders return so devastating. "Here in Senegal," he continues, "success is by force. Even if you're doing something bad like selling cocaine, as long as you bring money, you're seen as successful. So when you come back with nothing, it's shameful because everyone believes Europe is El Dorado. If you don't succeed, they say it's your fault, you were lazy, you didn't want to work."

For men, the failure to succeed abroad often means more than financial disappointment as it touches the core of what it means to be a man. The inability to marry, provide for a family, or build a home marks a rupture in the path toward social adulthood. Abass describes the heavy pressure he feels from his family, especially his mother, to marry and settle down. Although he is in a relationship with a younger woman, he says he cannot afford to marry her. His girlfriend assumes he returned from Europe with lots of money and expects expensive gifts from him. "She wants me to buy her an iPhone!" he says in disbelief, "do you know how much that costs?" Yet, he feels he cannot tell her the truth about his story. "If she knew I have been deported, she might leave me," he admits. "She doesn't know I have nothing. I can't even afford a wedding. And even if I could, I am ashamed because she expects something

lavish, but I have nothing! I'm almost forty, I feel like my time is running out." For many men like Abass, the inability to marry or start a family after returning fuels the desire to migrate again, as a renewed journey becomes a way to reclaim self-worth and restore social standing. "I'm thinking about Albania, or maybe South America," he tells me, saying that he had heard a visa for Albania is relatively cheap, and that there are places in South America where Senegalese nationals do not need one. From there, he says, he hopes to cross into the United States.

If, as seen in Chapter IV, men are typically expected to provide for their families, making the pressure of failure particularly acute, women who break gender roles and undertake the journey to become breadwinner roles, often face a different but equally heavy burden upon their return. Like men, they may deplete family resources and return empty-handed, but the stigma they face is compounded by the transgression of gender norms: the simple act of travelling alone is perceived as morally wrong, and upon return they are judged for having tried. This is illustrated by the story of Astou, a 20-year-old woman from the Kolda region, who left Senegal alone in the hope of improving her family's situation. After several failed attempts, she returned home, only to face disappointment and stigma:

"It hurt me to return, I was discouraged, really embarrassed, and full of complexes. I was ashamed to come back like that, without having achieved anything. I felt responsible for my family. That's why I waited a few weeks before returning to them. I went to Dakar first, to process everything, so I could face my home. When I finally returned, it was very difficult. I stayed at home for almost two weeks without stepping outside. For a woman it is difficult, you know. I would hear people saying things like, 'She doesn't know anything, a woman shouldn't be doing this. The route isn't for women, it's for men.' These words stayed with me. They made me afraid to go out."

Astou's narrative underscores how shame, in the context of failed mobility, is constantly reinforced by the community. Women are reminded that in choosing movement, they stepped outside of the moral codes attached to womanhood that prescribe staying, marrying, and having children. For these reasons, for women, returning often means re-entering the gendered scripts they tried to escape, as a way to restore their social standing and "redeem" themselves from the stigma attached to their mobility. This is evident in the story of Aissata, a woman in her twenties from the Kolda region, who returned to Senegal after some unsuccessful attempts to cross from Morocco:

“When I returned, I heard a lot of nasty things. People said, ‘You left to improve your life, but look, your situation is even worse now. Your mother died while you were gone. You thought travel was a woman’s affair? You didn’t understand anything, women shouldn’t travel. Women should stay, marry and have kids.’”

Several months after her return, the combined weight of grief, failure, and social judgment led Aissata to marry. She now has two children. She frames this decision as the only way for her to move forward in life:

“Since I had tried and failed, and my mother was gone, I thought it was better to stay, accept what came, and accept my fate. When I returned, people told me there was a man who loved me. I thought maybe I could start a family with him, start over from scratch. Maybe if my luck didn’t come, my children’s might. I said to myself, ‘I must stay, get married, and raise children well so they can succeed.’ Now that I’m married with children, I no longer want to travel. My only wish is to support my children. What interests me now isn’t what people say about me, but how to give my children a home and a future.”

Like Aissata, Sira also turned to marriage as a way of restoring her social standing after returning. In her twenties, she had left her home in Ziguinchor to flee a toxic family environment. Her return, however, brought her back to the same unresolved tensions:

“When I came back to the family home, all the problems I had before came rushing back. I just wanted to leave again, so I got married. I chose a husband by chance, just to get out. People said, ‘You’re really going to marry him? He’s old!’ But I said yes, I just wanted to leave. It’s true that marriage is hard, especially when you live in your husband’s family home. If you don’t assert yourself, you can’t survive it. [...] Afterward, we had a daughter and I realised that what I was looking for there [in Europe], I could have here.”

Yet, not all women describe marriage as a choice they freely made. For some, it was an obligation framed as a remedy for their perceived moral transgressions. Aicha, a thirty-year-old woman from Kolda, attempted to reach Europe twice. After her first failed journey, exhausted and without money, she returned to Senegal. But instead of finding rest or support, she was met with coercion from her family:

“When I came back, I stayed locked in my room for six months. That’s when my father decided to marry me off. I was forced into marriage. I first refused, but in the end, I had no choice but to accept, even though I didn’t like it. He said, ‘A woman is not meant to travel, she must marry.’ So he gave me to this old man who married me, even though I didn’t want it. I had to accept it by force. But I ended up divorcing.”

Following her divorce, Aicha embarked on a second attempt to reach Europe. But once again, the journey fell apart. She lost everything and returned to Senegal, where the weight of disappointment pushed her into a deep depression. “She wouldn’t leave her room,” her cousin tells me. “She barely ate. She just slept all day.” During that time, a man from her village began visiting her regularly. He brought perfumes, clothes, treats and small gifts to cheer her up. His presence slowly became a source of comfort: “He was very supportive. He came every day, bringing me things I liked, like candies or small gifts, encouraging me to keep going. He helped me come out of that dark place.”

Eventually, under renewed pressure from her family and driven by a mix of gratitude and emotional exhaustion, she agreed to marry him: “I felt I had no strength left to fight. He had helped me after all, and everyone said I should marry him.” But this marriage did not last either. Within a few months, Aicha divorced for the second time. Her decision angered her father deeply. “He couldn’t understand. He was furious. He immediately tried to arrange another marriage, to ‘fix’ everything again.” Shortly after, her father passed away and she was free to decide not to remarry.

These narratives reveal that forced return is not simply a matter of spatial displacement but a profound rupture in one’s moral and social standing, generating feelings of shame, failure, and emotional distress. Mobility becomes inscribed in the body as a psychological and affective wound, with responses such as isolation, withdrawal, or silence functioning as survival tactics within moral economies that stigmatise return as failure. These embodied and affective experiences are deeply shaped by gendered norms. For men, mobility is intertwined with ideals of masculinity linked to economic provision, autonomy, and success abroad, making forced return a threat to both physical security and symbolic manhood. Some men seek to reclaim fractured masculine identities through marriage or renewed mobility. For women, return is filtered through patriarchal expectations of sexual respectability and marriageability, which can involve gender violence including forced marriage. Yet women are not passive recipients of these norms; their trajectories reflect

complex negotiations ranging from conformity and acceptance of traditional gender roles to resistance through divorce or strategic use of marriage to gain financial security or escape oppressive kinship. These stories demonstrate that mobility practice persists beyond physical movement, unfolding through embodied, affective, and gendered strategies that renegotiate social belonging after return.

The Autonomy of Forced Returns

The encounter between people's mobility and border externalisation in the context of forced returns does not result solely in subjugation or surrender. Instead, it leaves both small and significant spaces for agency. Returnees actively navigate their circumstances, negotiating their social position, reclaiming a sense of self-worth, and crafting new ways to move forward, whether by rebuilding their lives in Senegal or by reigniting the mobility imaginaries explored in Chapter IV, potentially setting the stage for renewed movement. Whether or not individuals ultimately succeed in these efforts, the very act of attempting to reconstruct one's life or reinitiate mobility constitutes a response to the politics of exhaustion and immobilisation imposed by EU border regimes. Drawing on De Genova's (2018a) concept of the "autonomy of deportation," this final section engages with the autonomy of forced return, foregrounding the persistence of mobility and the resilience, agency, and endurance of returnees. In doing so, it frames return not as the end of mobility, but as a continuation of mobility as both an imagined and political practice.

Reimagining Mobility, Reframing the Journey

One of the ways people respond to forced return is by reimagining new forms of mobility. Most of the returnees I met confessed, sometimes explicitly, sometimes obliquely, that *l'idée de l'Europe est toujours dans ma tête* (the idea of Europe is always in my mind). This refrain illustrates how, despite the violence of border externalisation and the trauma of forced return, immobilisation does not erase the aspiration for elsewhere. Mobility, for most of them, still endured as a horizon of possibility, sustained through imagination, memory, and desire. Envisioning a life beyond Senegal served both as a coping strategy and a quiet form of resistance to the reintegration narrative promoted by return programs, exemplified by the glossy promotional videos that loop in the waiting rooms of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, urging returnees to rebuild their lives at home. Although not everyone I met

articulated their aspirations clearly, and many spoke with ambivalence, most had not abandoned the idea of future movement. Some were determined to find another backdoor, insisting that they were merely pausing to prepare for the next attempt. Others spoke more vaguely of fate, holding on to hope of future mobility without a concrete plan. Still, even among those who said they would never take the clandestine route again, many admitted they would leave immediately if granted a visa, or would send a son or younger brother in their place. Words like *espoir* (hope), *envie* (desire), and *ambition* frequently punctuated their accounts of future mobility plans, signaling an enduring mobility practice that continues even in the absence of physical movement.

This persistent state of anticipation resonates with what Khosravi (2021) calls “wakefulness in waiting”: a mode of being in which people remain alert to future possibilities while navigating constrained presents. Awa, a woman in her twenties from a village in the region of Kolda, returned after a failed attempt to buy a Schengen visa in Cape Verde. Married with a child at the time we met, she lived in a state of wakefulness:

“When I returned, I got married, but I have not lost hope [to make it to Europe]. If I ever get the chance to leave again, I will. [...] I still have ambition, the ambition to change my family’s life. I am waiting, watching, hoping that maybe one day I will find a way to get a visa and leave, or that I will find another way to take the clandestine route to Europe. Even though I have a husband and a child, my mind is still on the journey.”

The drive toward mobility endures both in the anticipation and preparation for future journeys, and in the memories and re-imaginings of past ones, where the experience of travel continues to shape how people see themselves and their possibilities. This is especially true for those who had reached Europe, for whom remembering becomes a way to endure the loss and make sense of the return. But even for those who never arrived, the journey is rarely seen as wasted. Bocar, for instance, refuses to speak of failure:

“I have absolutely no regrets. I have many memories. There are things that have made me who I am today. When I think about it, it strengthens me. Even though I am here now, it gives me the motivation to work harder, to keep going. Because the route was tough. It’s not easy at all. But I don’t regret taking it. Even though I didn’t succeed, I don’t regret it because it taught me so much. The journey taught me, it woke me up. I now understand that to succeed in life, you have to fight.”

The idea that returning without having succeeded in the socio-cultural sense of *tekki* does not equate to returning with nothing is echoed by many. Ramatoulaye, whose journey took her through Morocco and included two failed attempts to cross the sea from Laayoune, draws a direct connection between her mobility experience and a transformed sense of herself as a woman. For her, the journey catalysed a break from gender norms that equate femininity with economic dependence. “Here in the village, if you don’t travel, you don’t see much, you don’t have any ambition,” she explains, reflecting on how most of her female childhood friends never left Senegal, instead marrying young, having children, and depending entirely on their husbands. Her eyes light up as she speak about her time in Morocco and the knowledge she gained there:

“When you travel, you see how other people live, how they progress. Even if you don’t achieve that same life, you learn from it. In Morocco, for example, I saw how Congolese women work hard for themselves. That pushed me. I couldn’t just sit around anymore. I saw many women leaving their countries, their families, to work. That changed my mentality. When I came back, I changed the way I live. Before, I didn’t work. I waited for my brother to give me money. If he didn’t, I would get angry. Now, I don’t ask for anything. I work for myself. That’s what I learned from traveling. It taught me independence, and for that, I am grateful. Even though I didn’t reach Europe, I have no regrets.”

Abass, who was forcibly returned from Germany, also offers a reframing of mobility not as failure, but as a form of informal education: “As I always say, traveling is like going to university, it doesn’t matter whether you succeed financially or not, you always learn something.” In Germany, he explains, he picked up practical skills that proved invaluable once back in Senegal: how to interact with other people, how to manage time, and how to navigate multilingual environments. He learned to speak both English and German, he says with pride, intermittently slipping words from those languages into his French as we speak. With the little money he made in Germany and with the support of a small reintegration grant from the German Agency for Development Cooperation (GIZ), he was able to launch a modest guesthouse business:

“Some people think migration is only about making money, but it’s not. Of course, money is important, but it’s not everything! Traveling is about knowledge, experience, culture. You meet new people, you see different ways of life. I learned so much, new skills, new perspectives.

That's why many of us don't see migration as a failure, even if we didn't return rich. I learned a business in Europe, and now I'm using it here. If I had never left, I wouldn't have had this opportunity."

Bocar, Ramatoulaye and Abass's narratives reveal how mobility persists even after forced return. Through memory, imagination, and the repurposing of knowledge gained in transit, returnees reclaim agency and challenge the imposed narrative of failure. Rather than being fixed in place, they continue to move, affectively, imaginatively, and strategically, transforming past journeys into tools for surviving and reconfiguring life in the aftermath of return through the social capital gained abroad.

The Professional Returnee

While the autonomy of forced return is evident in the ways individuals continue to imagine mobility or reframe narratives of failure, the experience of mobility itself is also reappropriated by some as a foundation for rebuilding life in Senegal. Drawing on the embodied knowledge, skills, and perspectives gained through their journeys, some returnees navigate post-return life as a continuation of their mobility practice, now rooted in the local context. During fieldwork, I met several returnee-led organisations funded by individuals who drew directly on their own experiences of departure, and return. These individuals often positioned themselves as privileged interlocutors, not only for the Senegalese state, European institutions, and international organisations engaged in soft-border externalisation campaigns, but also for researchers like myself. In doing so, they became mediators, gatekeepers, and translators of migration knowledge, articulating their lived experiences in ways that resonate with donor expectations and policy frameworks. Often, they perform the role of the "*professional returnee*," someone who, having endured the journey, now publicly expresses regret and participates in local initiatives aimed at dissuading others from undertaking unauthorised migration. Through this performance, also observed in other contexts beyond Senegal (e.g. Magallanes-Gonzalez 2020; Shaidrova 2023), they access funding from NGOs and EU-backed programs invested in the prevention of so-called irregular migration and the promotion of "sustainable reintegration." For professional returnees, return is reframed as an opportunity to (attempt to) *make it* at home (Rodriguez 2017), not only by creating income-generating activities, but also by regaining a sense of social worth and countering the stigma often attached to forced return. This shift marks an important transformation: from mobility as an embodied practice to a political practice, one in which returnees

strategically engage with the apparatus of border externalisation. In doing so, they transform their personal journeys into social and (sometimes) economic capital, which they leverage within the expanding industry of migration management. Although returnees often remain marginal within the migration industry and may be exploited or gain little financially, it is important to view them not merely as victims or passive enactors of European policies, but as individuals who, even within highly asymmetric and often exploitative power relations, are able to navigate the mechanisms of externalisation strategically and turn their experiences into social capital.

One example of professional returnee is the story of Serigne, the leader of a local returnee association from a traditional fishing village close to Dakar. Serigne arrived in the Canary Islands in 2006. Like many others from this first generation of adventurers, he was forcibly returned shortly after arrival as part of the massive *refoulement* campaign carried out by the Spanish government at that time. Serigne, like many others, saw his dream of Europe shattered in a particularly cruel way. Shortly after his forced return, Serigne tried to navigate his situation by finding another pathway to success, establishing a returnee association to “fight against irregular migration.” He quickly became well-known in the Dakar area for his radio campaigns raising awareness about so-called irregular migration, his youth outreach initiatives, and his entrepreneurship training programs for returnees and would-be migrants. When I met him through mutual acquaintances, he immediately embodies the role of the professional returnee with me. Without me even asking, he starts talking about his migration experience and how much he regrets it. He then takes me for a walk around his neighbourhood and the beach, giving me detailed accounts of how departures are organised and inviting me to take pictures of everything to “document the conditions in which people depart.” As part of his discourse as a professional returnee, Serigne describes the efforts he and his association make to dissuade people from taking the pirogue to Europe. He laments that their work is constantly undermined by the lack of economic support, suggesting that with more funding, they could run additional programs, training sessions, and awareness campaigns to save lives. A few weeks after our first meeting, Serigne invites me to join a two-day awareness campaign aimed at discouraging young people from migrating, sponsored by the European Commission and the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation (AECID). As I descend from the bus stop, a few hundred meters from the beach where it takes place, the air already vibrates with loud popular music, punctuated by the laughter, shouts, and playful screams of young people running along the sand. The centrepiece of the event

is a football match. As soon as I walk down the beach, Serigne makes sure I take a seat on the plastic chairs arranged under a blue tarpaulin stretched to shield the few spectators from the sun. Many of the chairs are empty, and sitting among the public, I am joined by another European woman and a few other members of the association I recognise. Loud music continues to play from speakers as flocks of boys, anywhere between eight and twenty years old, run onto the beach and begin to play. In between goals and bursts of cheering, Serigne lifts a megaphone and delivers brief, forceful speeches, insisting that clandestine migration must be stopped. Nobody seems to be paying much attention to him. All attention is focused on the football match and Serigne's words scatter into the air, competing with the sound of the ball on the sand and the shouts of the players. When the match ends, Serigne asks me to take a picture with him and the two football teams in front of a banner displaying the logos of the European Union and the Spanish Agency for Development Cooperation. He invites all young people on the beach to join. He also makes sure I was visible among the football players, explaining proudly that he would share the photo with the donors and on social media, so that they could secure more events like this in the future. Thanks to his association, Serigne has become a prominent figure in his community, able to mobilise both economic and social capital. He is able to present himself to European audiences and Senegalese authorities as the emblematic returnee who came back with nothing, now committed to preventing others from facing the same fate. This visibility grants him access to a portion of the migration industry, though the resources are limited and often inconsistent. At the same time, his leadership role within the association, and the opportunities to speak publicly, attend events on migration, or receive visits from European donors, journalists and researchers alike, strengthen his social standing and enable him to at least partially restore his identity as a returnee.

Moustapha is the founder of another returnee organization located in the suburbs of Dakar. I met him as part of the awareness-raising campaign project "Origin," funded by the Spanish NGO Open Arms. The project's objective was to "inform and raise awareness in the community of origin" about the risks of so-called irregular migration and to present sustainable local alternatives. When I met him, Moustapha was involved in one of the awareness projects in a classroom of children, informing about the risks of crossing the sea by pirogue and emphasising the importance of traveling legally. Like Serigne, Moustapha was part of the first generation of people who attempted the journey to the Canary Islands in 2006 but was turned back shortly after. Upon his return to Senegal, he decided to establish an association for "returnees and potential

migrants” and even founded an elementary school for marginalised children in his community. During our conversation, he claims that education is a crucial tool in preventing young people from making “the mistake” he and others once made. The shameful feeling returnees feel, are used in his projects to dissuade young people from departing. As he explains proudly, his school is deeply engaged in programs designed to “raise awareness, guide young people, and equip them with the right information.” As he speaks with me and a French journalist who happened to be visiting the school on the same day, Moustapha perfectly performs the role of the professional returnee, reflecting on his past and explaining how deeply he regrets the journey:

“We made these mistakes by leaving because we had an image of Europe since we were children. Now, we need to inform these young people as early as possible and emphasise the importance of education, because an uneducated child, one who lacks certain information, absorbs everything. [...] I realised early on the need to inform these young people about the dangers, because a child who is educated early, who grows up with this awareness, will never take those risks. We didn’t have that chance to be informed.”

In a quite dramatic tone, Moustapha also recalls how, upon boarding the pirogue, he thought he was committing “the worst mistake of [his] life”. He tells us that he promised himself that if he survived, he would do everything possible to prevent others from doing the same and to show young people that “one can learn and succeed here in the country.” As we continue our conversation, he casually mentions that he just returned from a trip to the Ivory Coast, where he met with other returnees. He also shares that, since founding his association, he has had the opportunity to travel to France and Spain several times. “Legally,” he emphasises. For Moustapha, forced return became more than just a rupture: it opened the possibility to establish an association, enhance his social standing, and generate economic opportunities. Crucially, this transformation also reshaped his mobility. By moving from the position of an “irregular migrant” to that of a “professional returnee,” he gained access to a visa and travel opportunities that had previously been denied. His experience shows how the social capital associated with the status of “professional returnee” not only restores social standing within local communities but also bolsters legitimacy in the eyes of border authorities, facilitating legal travel.

While Moustapha’s words often seem to follow the perfect script aligned with the EU’s migration management agenda, in our conversation he also voiced sharp dissatisfaction with how migration is being handled, both at the

European level and by his own government. Unlike many other returnees who avoided openly criticising the system, Moustapha articulated a broader critique of migration policies, showing how while aligning with EU priorities by reproducing certain discourses to improve their life prospects, some professional returnees do also retain more critical stances. As we speak, he leans in slightly, lowering his voice:

“I think that right now, the problem is that the European Union is preventing departures... I will say it directly: many of us think it’s racism. Many think so directly. They don’t want us to come because they are racist! They should make it easier for us to come to you, just as you come to us.”

Although these stories unfold within the environment shaped by European border externalisation policies, which rely on non-coercive forms of control such as awareness-raising campaigns, integration projects, and training initiatives, people like Serigne and Moustapha are far from passive. Their experiences illustrate how they actively navigate their forced return as a form of mobility practice in which vulnerability and stigmatisation is strategically leveraged. By fitting the identity of the “professional returnee,” these men access funding, social capital, and community legitimacy, offsetting the stigma of return and reshaping their trajectories by trying to create for themselves opportunities to *tekki*. Moreover, by framing their work as able to prevent unauthorised departures, they move beyond the passivity imposed on them by forced return, and position themselves as active agents capable of influencing the mobility of others. This process reflects the broader politics of return in which forced mobility is not simply experienced as loss, but reimagined as an opportunity for *tekki* within new parameters. Yet this pathway remains often insufficient due to the limited opportunities available within a migration industry that remains highly extractive, and deeply gendered: typically, only male returnees succeed in leveraging the professional returnee role, as women face structural barriers linked to their socially constrained position in the public sphere, as well as the moral stigma associated with female independent mobility.

Furthermore, the recent proliferation of returnee associations has created a competitive and often exclusionary environment. Ibrahim’s story provides a striking counterpoint to the more triumphant returnee narratives, showing how this highly competitive industry can foster exploitation and rivalry, where older returnees or community leaders (who might not even have migrated) often gain access to funding, leaving younger returnees without support. After

making the perilous crossing from Libya to Italy and then returning to Senegal, Ibrahim has received little support from NGOs or state-institutions, only a motorbike to start a mototaxi business. Yet the business has never really taken off, and he still struggles to cover his family expenses. For this reason, when he was approached by a community-leader to participate in an initiative to talk to young people about his migratory journey he accepted without hesitation. This seemed like the perfect opportunity to transform his forced return into a meaningful way to gain some social and economic capital:

“One day one leader of a local association came to me and asked me if I wanted to participate in this project. It works like this. They tell you that you need to raise awareness among the youth by telling them your story, how difficult it was, how you regret it etc. They tell you to encourage people not to take the same path as you, and to guide them to organisations and structures that will help them find a job.”

Following these instructions, Ibrahim became a public voice warning others about the dangers of migration and directing young people toward supposed resources, both on local radio stations and at public events. His message (that instead of migrating, people could be helped to find jobs) reflects a broader pattern in which development aid is used to secure acceptance of otherwise unpopular repatriations, by both the Senegalese state and local communities. Officially, such aid is presented not only as support for returnees but also as a tool for poverty reduction and for addressing migration at its “roots,” providing so-called potential migrants with employment opportunities meant to curb their desire to move. In practice, however, the reality rarely matches these promises. Programs are often short-term and limited, benefiting only a few. As Ibrahim recounts, when young people he had directed sought help, they found nothing: “Young people call me out in the street to say, ‘Hey, where’s the support? We went there. We submitted our funding requests. Why haven’t we seen anything yet?’”

The experience of the youth in Ibrahim’s town mirrors the crushed expectations of many others I met, whether returned or not, who described reintegration funds and so-called migration-prevention money as nothing more than empty promises. This gap between expectation and reality deepened Ibrahim’s sense of isolation. Rather than being seen as a leader or a source of guidance, he became the target of ridicule, as people accused him of lying, dismissing his warnings as empty words: “Now people will call me a liar because I was the one who told them not to take the route, because with this or that NGO, if you go there, they can help you, when that’s not the truth!”

Beyond failing to generate any social capital, his involvement in these campaigns provided him with no financial relief either. Ibrahim recounts how he spends his fuel for transport, his time and energy, while returnee associations promised support that never materialised:

“Every time, they tell me, ‘You’re chosen to do such-and-such awareness campaigns.’ I never stop raising awareness. I’ve done it with local radio stations, in neighborhoods with associations. But to tell you the truth, they do not even reimburse transportation. They’re exploiting me, because all of these awareness-raising campaigns are funded by someone, yet the funds never reach us, the migrants. That’s why it hurts.”

Ibrahim’s experience illustrates that although some returnees manage to take advantage of opportunities generated by non-explicitly coercive forms of control, such as awareness-raising initiatives, for others these mechanisms result in the devaluation of their work and deeper marginalisation within their communities. The figure of the “professional returnee,” celebrated as a pathway to reintegration for some, can equally become a site of exploitation and disillusionment. Instead of genuine opportunities, being a “professional return” becomes a performance that extracts value from already marginalised people through empty promises of employment and that preys on returnee’s social and financial vulnerability. At the same time, just as Ibrahim feels undervalued by a system that offers him only promises instead of real opportunities, the people he interacts with feel similarly about him. These dynamics fuel rivalry and division within communities, pitting individuals against one another, while frustrations are rarely directed at the structures and mechanisms that produce these conditions.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined the colonial encounter between forced (backward) mobility and border externalisation, analysing its manifestations during the forced return process from both Europe and Africa, as well as its lasting and diffused effects in the days, months, and years that follow. If Chapter V traced how the journey is marked by racialised bordering, abandonment, and violence, this chapter has shown how deportation continues and compounds these harms, consolidating a regime of containment that does not end with interception but extends into the return and post-return phases. In this sense, forced return should be understood not as a discrete event, but as a mechanism within a broader colonial architecture of mobility control. It enacts a continuation of bordering through the body, temporality, and space, mobilising forms of harm that are institutional, affective, and material. What appears as a bureaucratic act of removal is in fact a recursive practice of immobility that reasserts the diffused violence of the border regime. By approaching forced return through the lens of mobility practice, this chapter has shown that return is not simply the reversal of a journey, but a complex site of struggle where embodied, imagined, and political engagements with mobility unfold. Mobility is not erased by return but fractured, rerouted, and reconstituted through the everyday negotiations that follow. Returns often produce a rupture in the continuity of one's life trajectory and mobility project, yet they also open up unstable and contested spaces where new forms of agency can emerge.

First, the chapter reveals the embodied dimension of forced backward mobility. The physical and psychological toll of deportation is not incidental but foundational to how the return regime operates: through exhaustion, trauma, surveillance, and neglect. Whether through imprisonment, interrogation, chaining, or abandonment, the return process imposes embodied forms of control that persist beyond the moment of arrival. The inadequacy of institutional responses, whether framed as humanitarian reintegration or state removal, further displaces responsibility and pathologises returnees, individualising their suffering and shifting attention away from the structural brutality of return. Yet embodiment also becomes a site of resilience. Returnees live through shame, stigma, and fractured social relations, but they also negotiate gendered norms and social isolation in ways that exceed passive endurance. Women and men reconfigure the meanings of marriage, family, and success, sometimes through acts of strategic conformity to expected scripts and other times through refusal. The ways people embody return challenge the

notion of reintegration as a neutral or inherently positive outcome, revealing the socio-cultural and gender norms that shape it and how individuals navigate these constraints.

As an imagined practice, mobility persists beyond the act of forced return, continuing to structure how people orient themselves toward the future. Deportation does not extinguish the aspiration to move; rather, it often intensifies it, reinforcing the will to migrate again or to reconfigure life projects disrupted by return. These mobility imaginaries function as fragile yet resilient refusals of the immobilising logics of border externalisation, which frame return as a definitive and final state. In contexts where return is marked by shame, fractured social ties, and institutional abandonment, the very ability to imagine renewed movement becomes life-affirming, showing that life is not over and that mobility has not been definitively foreclosed. This emerges not only from the anticipation and planning of future movements, but also from the recollection of past journeys. Even when interrupted or violently halted, the journey becomes a site of meaning-making that continues to shape the present. Recalling moments of movement allows returnees to reclaim mobility as an ongoing orientation, anchoring their present immobility in an embodied, affective connection to past journeys. In both cases, mobility remains a horizon of possibility.

As a political practice, mobility emerges in the everyday manoeuvres through which returnees reframe their experiences. Taking control of one's narrative over mobility and refusing the framing of return as failure, constitutes a political intervention into dominant discourses. Returnees who rearticulate their mobility as knowledge and self-growth are engaging in acts of resignification that challenge binaries such as seeing movement as success and force return as failure. The figure of the "professional returnee" encapsulates both the potential and the limits of this political reappropriation. While some strategically mobilise their experience to reclaim dignity and economic survival, others experience this performativity as hollow or degrading, revealing the uneven terrain of agency within the neoliberal and humanitarian logics of return and reintegration.

Against this backdrop, this chapter contributes to a decolonial feminist analysis of border externalisation by centring the embodied, gendered, and temporal complexities of forced return as experienced from below. It challenges dominant state and neoliberal frameworks that depoliticise return through technocratic reintegration discourses, instead highlighting how those subjected to these regimes actively negotiate and reconfigure their social realities amid

structural violence. In doing so, it exposes the inadequacy of neoliberal reintegration narratives, which mask the structural violences of border externalisation beneath a seemingly neutral rhetoric of self-reliance, entrepreneurialism, and individual development, thereby sustaining broader regimes of disposability and marginalisation even upon return. Without resorting to a romanticised account of forced return, this chapter reframes returnees not as passive victims of a violent system, but as individuals who, despite very constrained and painful conditions, and with limited support, assert varying degrees of agency in reappropriating a deeply traumatic experience, and learn how to move on from it. Furthermore, by introducing a gendered perspective, this chapter disrupts the tendency to universalise the returnee experience as inherently masculine by amplifying the voices of women returnees, revealing the ways they navigate and contest social and gender norms, even if this does not always imply an open rupture.

Chapter VII: Motherhood, Loss, and Im/mobility

In 2020, Alassane left his home in a coastal fishing village to board a pirogue bound for Spain. His mother cannot recall that day without her chest tightening. What happened remains unclear: fragments of information floated through the community, whispered accounts and contradictory stories. There was no official confirmation, no body to bury, no grave to visit. Only an unbearable silence remained, stretching endlessly like the ocean that had swallowed him. I first met Mother Hope on a bright, cloudless day, standing near the very beach from which her son Alassane departed, where the sand is littered with colourful wooden fishing boats, some newly painted, others worn by salt and time. She has been invited to speak at a public event held to commemorate Senegalese youth lost at sea. Among a panel of mostly men, she is the only woman given the floor. I watch as she stands before a crowd of male community members and a couple of European journalists, her stance composed, her gaze direct. “You know,” she begins, her voice calm but resolute, “it’s the mothers of the missing who bear the weight of the suffering from the moment their children depart.” As she talks, she pauses often, scanning the crowd, and her words are pronounced quietly, almost as a whisper. Among the people who attend, a few other women sit quietly, draped in brightly coloured boubous and headscarves. They look at her, with an expression which feels like a mix of support and shared sorrow. “We know we’re many,” she continues, “but we don’t want those numbers to keep growing, because it means more suffering for the women. Migration, it’s the women who feel it most. The ones who have left are already gone, but it’s the women who remain. We’re the ones who give birth. And when we talk about the love of a child, I can say it starts with the woman first.” After she spoke, a brief silence followed. In that moment, her words did not just echo her own pain; they summoned a collective memory shared by many women across Senegal’s coastal towns, whose sons, husbands and brothers vanished into the Atlantic without a trace, disappearing from one day to the next.

This chapter examines the encounter between border externalisation and family life, focusing on how women, and especially mothers, are uniquely affected by the loss of loved ones. In doing so, it advances our understanding of the diffused and gender-specific effects of border externalisation on those who remain. This encounter brings into view a form of mobility that is not solely about movement, but also about absence, waiting, and grief. Within the chapter, mobility practice emerges as both embodied and political, unfolding through the ways in which women live, endure, and respond to the consequences of border deaths and disappearances. Mobility is embodied in how mothers and wives live through the absence of their loved ones. This experience is also shaped by the social construction of motherhood in the Senegalese society, as well as societal expectations around care and responsibility. Yet mobility practice is also political, precisely because these embodied experiences do not remain confined to the private realm. Through acts of collective mourning, care, and visibility, women transform personal pain into shared forms of agency that contest the silencing effects of border regimes. In this way, the chapter approaches mobility practice not only as a matter of crossing or being stopped at borders, but as a socially organised and gendered response to loss. It shows how the encounter with border externalisation reshapes the everyday lives of those who remain, while also opening spaces, however fragile, for resistance, resilience, and the reassertion of life in the face of death.

In West Africa, mobility is often portrayed as a male domain, with women cast as secondary actors, companions, mothers, wives, and sisters supporting male migration projects (Dianka, 2015; Boatemaa Setrana & Kleist, 2022). Yet women are central to mobility: financing journeys (Melly, 2011; Sakho & Dial, 2010; Tall, 2008), seeking blessings from religious leaders (Deshingkar & Gueye, 2022), and managing remittances (Tall & Tandian, 2010). Research on “motherhood in transit” across Morocco, Libya, and Tunisia further challenges passive depictions, revealing motherhood as both strategy and site of negotiation, simultaneously enabling and constraining mobility (Tyszler, 2019; Chemlali, 2023, 2024; Stock, 2012). Another literature strand highlights mothers mobilising after their sons disappear en route to Europe (Andersson 2014; Souiah, 2019; Garnaoui, 2022), with Bouilly (2016) notably applying social movement theory to examine Senegalese mothers’ activism. Building on these works and contributing to the still-scarce literature on the motherhood of the disappeared, this chapter challenges narratives that cast West-African women as passive victims left behind by men on the move. Instead, it foregrounds alternative expressions of womanhood, motherhood, and

im/mobility, revealing the deep, tragic impact of border externalisation on women, but also showcasing women's resilience and resistance.

The first part of this chapter explores how mothers experience the loss of a loved one as an intimate, embodied reality, navigating their pain in both private and public spheres. This section draws on my participation in women's collective meetings and focuses closely on the personal stories and coping strategies women spontaneously shared during these gatherings. centring the experiences of two mothers who lost their sons at sea, which I call Mother Courage and Mother Hope, the second part of the chapter highlights how women's collectives form and operate. This second section focuses on how these groups transform personal grief into a driving force for change in their lives, and for the role of women in Senegalese society more broadly.

Border Deaths and the Embodied Experience of Loss

On an afternoon in early November, I sit with Mother Hope and about twenty women from her collective, gathered for the second meeting of a community-based support initiative for mourning families. The room buzzes with soft conversation as the women enter, each quietly finding a place in the circle of plastic chairs, lighting up the modestly furnished room with the vivid patterns and bright hues of their wax dresses. Mother Hope and I stand near the entrance, where she greets each woman with warmth. "Here," she says gesturing toward the seated group, "we can share our stories and find ways to make sense of our pain, with the support of a psychologist who helps guide us through our emotions."

What follows is a slow and painful unfolding of memories, fragments of stories offered in soft, halting voices. Their words carried the physical weight of grief: tightened chests, sleepless nights, bodies worn by worry and waiting. Toward the end of the gathering, an imam joins the circle to lead a prayer, marking the spiritual and communal anchoring of these rituals of mourning. Through these women's testimonies, and in quieter, more intimate conversations outside the formal circle, mobility practice emerges as an embodied experience felt in waiting and absence. The painful narratives shared in this section convey not only the emotional toll of sudden loss, grief, disbelief, and the stigma that often follows, but also the material consequences of mobility as households are thrown into economic precarity. Mobility practice is thus embodied for women

through both the emotional and material burdens they are left to carry, as well as through the strategies they develop to navigate and endure these challenges.

The Emotional Burden of the Left Behind: Silence, Pain and Blame

Mame, a woman in her forties, sits quietly in the circle, her hands folded in her lap, her voice barely above a whisper, her eyes fixed on a spot just beyond the room's walls. "One day Cheick, my son, came to tell me, 'Mom, I'm going to travel,'" she says as she began to recall the story of her late son. Cheick was her only son, the one who stood by his aging father to provide for the family. Hearing of his plan to risk everything for a journey to Europe had shaken her to the core. "I have lost both my father and my mother," she recalls telling him, "you are all I have left. Please, I beg you to stay. I cannot bear the thought of losing you too." She had tried to hold on, to reason with him, to even beg him not to go. One night, she was startled awake by his voice shouting in the darkness. Heart pounding, she rushed to his room. "Tell me the truth," she asked, "Are you leaving?" Cheick looked up and reassured her gently that he was not planning to leave. She remembers how, the day after, she had tried to keep him close, "I forbade him from leaving the house," she said. That day, Cheick slept for hours, then took a shower and ate in silence. Later, Mame found him by the shore, sitting alone on a pirogue by the water and staring out at the ocean. "What's going on? Where are you going?" she asked. He repeated that he was not going anywhere. That night he did not sleep home and the next morning, he came running back to his room. "Cheick, where have you been?" she asked. His reply was quick: "Our pirogue is about to fill up." She reminded him of her plea: "Didn't I forbid you to go?" But again, his words tried to reassure her: "Mom, I already told you, I'm not leaving." Even then, his departure was wrapped in denial, as if speaking it aloud might make it more real. Cheick went to his room, but "acted strange". Then, when Mame called out, she realised he had already slipped away:

"I called him and heard loud noises in the background. 'Cheick, what's happening? Please, get off that boat.' He answered, 'Mom, just pray for me. God is in control. Keep praying.' After that, his phone rang unanswered until dawn, then rang once more before going silent..."

As in Mame's story, many testimonies showed how most mothers begged their sons not to leave or even forbade them from stepping outside yet ultimately held no power over their decisions. Left behind, they grappled with a mix of confusion, helplessness, guilt, and regret. This emotional terrain is not separate

from mobility, but part of it as a relational and embodied practice shaped by the movement of others. These emotions are not just responses to their sons' departure, they are forms of inhabiting mobility, shaped by love, obligation, fear, and disempowerment. These losses often unfold in tension with the very motivations behind departure. Sons do not leave in spite of their mothers, but often because of them, out of a sense of care and responsibility. As explored in Chapter IV, the aspiration to migrate to Europe is deeply entangled with a moral obligation to support and improve the socio-economic conditions of one's parents, especially mothers. Ndèye, a vegetable seller in her fifties, recalled how her son Saliou had expressed this desire openly to her:

“One day I told him to come pick up the vegetables at the market where I work. When he arrived, he found me trying to lift something very heavy. Seeing me struggle Saliou said: ‘Mom, why are you lifting this? It’s too heavy, and you’re in pain. Pray for me, because when I become someone and have money, you won’t have to work anymore’.”

He spoke with quiet determination, expressing his desire to travel like the *modou modou*, and take care of her. Ndèye, however, responded with fear and caution, warning him of the risks: “I know how people use these pirogues to go to Europe, and that is not safe! Every day, we hear about deaths and disappearances, and I don’t want you to take one!”

Just like Mame’s son Cheick, Saliou also reassured his mother, swearing he would never leave like that. It was only weeks after his death that she learned that he left his job and had been all the time in the village next to theirs quietly preparing to make the journey to Europe. Knowing that he had left with the intention of improving her living conditions filled her with a complex mix of pride and guilt: pride in his sense of responsibility and sacrifice, but also guilt for being one of the reasons he undertook such a perilous journey.

If the stories above underscore how mothers are kept in the dark, other stories highlight how mothers are both actively misled by family members and how their emotional responses are dismissed as irrational or disruptive. This is exemplified in the experience of Khadidiatou, Bocar’s mother. Like many others, Bocar had lied to her, saying he was simply going to visit friends in Dakar. When his usual weekly calls stopped, Khadidiatou grew increasingly uneasy and turned to Bocar’s younger brother for answers:

“No matter how much I insisted, his brother wouldn’t admit that Bocar had taken the pirogue. He just kept saying, ‘Don’t worry, Mom, Bocar

is fine.'I asked again and again until finally, my son said, 'Stop worrying. Bocar is a man now. He's doing what a man does. You don't need to worry, he knows exactly what he's doing.'"

As detailed in Chapter V, Bocar did not reach Europe, but the pirogue survived the journey. Weeks later, he returned home, leaving Khadidatou with a turbulent mix of anger over his life-risking decision, feelings of betrayal due to his secrecy, and frustration at his repeated lies. Moreover, she tells me, her emotional distress was marginalised within the family: her other son dismissed her concerns as a failure to understand "what a man does" and her husband reprimanded her for her anxiety and tears, normalising Bocar's risk-taking as a generational rite of passage for men his generation. This dynamic illustrates how mothers' pain is compounded not only by their exclusion from knowledge about their sons' migration plans, but also by the invalidation of their emotional responses as either overreaction or ignorance of normative masculine practices. After several months, Bocar left again, and the cycle of pain, anger, and guilt began anew for Khadidatou. "I can no longer hold him back," she tells me in despair, "no matter what I do. I know he is going to leave again and again."

For many mothers, the experience of loss is not a sudden rupture but an unfolding, visceral process that begins in the body before it is confirmed by words. Long before the news of one's son's death arrives, pain announces itself: insomnia, swelling, tears, weight loss. This embodied response is not interpreted as coincidence, but, according to Mother Hope, is rooted in the special relationship between mother and child:

"It is the woman who carries the pregnancy, the child grows in her womb. When you give birth, it is you who bleeds... That's the reality. While the father feels the pain of losing their children, it is the mother who suffers more because the child is a part of her flesh."

Her words should be interpreted as part of a broader cultural understanding of motherhood as constituted by a spiritual and corporeal intimacy with one's children. Mothers are seen to possess a unique, affective proximity that allows them to feel absence without being told, shaping a distinctly gendered experience of loss as anticipated through the body. Mame recalls this feeling:

"When I realised that the pirogue with my son had truly departed, [...] I had a strange feeling, and I began to cry uncontrollably... For eight days, I couldn't sleep; I prayed until dawn. Over time, my eyes became

swollen, and I lost a lot of weight [...] I am a mother so I knew I would never see Cheick again until the day of judgement.”

Her account, like many others, underscores how grief does not wait for official confirmation, as mothers’ bodies anticipate, register, and carry the suffering that accompanies their children’s deaths.

Beyond physical suffering in anticipation of the news, many women recount having prophetic dreams that seemed to foretell their sons’ fate. These dreams form another layer of embodiment, revealing how deeply the mother–child bond is felt not only through the body but also through the unconscious and the imaginary. Mariama, a woman in her forties, learned of her son Samba’s departure only after overhearing it from other family members. In the days that followed, Mariama describes feeling a shift in her body, sleepless nights, a coldness in her chest, and visions:

“I lay down until dawn, and it felt as though I had a vision of Samba and my heart skipped a beat. My blood ran cold. [...] At dusk, his younger brother came home crying. He told me that Samba’s pirogue caught fire. I told him that I already knew Samba was dead.”

This embodied suffering intensifies upon confirmation of death. Many women describe their sorrow as manifesting physically: “feeling sick,” “falling apart,” “losing one’s mind.” The inability to cry or express grief is also common, shaped both by the shock of the event and by gendered expectations of emotional restraint, as Mariama recalls: “When we received the news, everyone else started crying, but for me, it felt as if God had held back my tears. Even now, I still can’t cry... as the one who gave birth to him, I can’t bring myself to shed a tear.”

In Senegal, cultural scripts of modesty and maternal strength (c.f. Oudenhuisen 2021) often place women in the contradictory position of being at the emotional centre of loss while being expected to remain composed for the sake of society. Mariama tells how, upon receiving the news of her own son’s death, one of her close female relatives immediately came to her house to remind her to “restrain herself and show modesty”, and “to keep her dignity as a mother even in grief”.

Mariama’s account echoes that of Fatima, a woman in her fifties who also lost her son, Karim, during a pirogue journey to Spain. Fatima also struggled with

the dissonance between overwhelming inner grief and the inability to express it publicly:

“Upon learning the news, I returned home and found people sitting around the front yard. I took a chair and sat down, silently. They asked me, ‘How can you be so calm?’ I told them, ‘Karim is dead.’ That’s when they all started to cry, but I managed to stay calm; I could not cry.”

Yet, Fatima’s composure collapsed in private, away from the gaze of others:

“At night, when everyone was asleep, I would walk around the yard, hoping to find Karim. [...] I could still see his reflection when he sat in front of the door with his friends. To tell you the truth, when nobody sees, I cry every day.”

In some families, just like the departures, deaths are cloaked in secrecy. Many mothers only discover the truth weeks later by overhearing whispered gossip or reading the hesitant, avoidant glances of neighbours. Mame, for instance, found out about Cheick’s death only weeks after he departed while doing her usual shopping at the market. She first sensed it in the way people looked at her with pity, as if they were hiding something. When she finally found the courage to ask, someone told her that her son had been among those who drowned in the pirogue. “Nobody had the courage to tell me before,” she recalls with frustration, “because they said they felt compassion for me, as my son and I were very close.”

For Mame, the absence of her son’s body intensified her grief. She explained that not being able to see or touch him, and not having a place to mourn, made it impossible to fully accept his death. This lack of closure left her suspended in an emotional limbo, a state echoed in the testimonies of other mothers I met. Many described similar feelings of unresolved loss, where the impossibility of confirming death with their own eyes gave rise to a lingering sense of hope. They spoke of vivid dreams, of hearing footsteps outside the door and wondering, just for a moment, if their son might return. Some recalled moments when they were certain they had seen their child on the street or in a crowd. This impossibility of closure without a body, which recurred across several testimonies, will be further explored in Chapter VIII.

Finally, the emotional burden women carry is further intensified by the gendered stigmatisation and blame they face following the loss of a son. When young people die at sea, it is often the mothers who bear the weight of societal

judgment and are held responsible for the tragedy. This deeply entrenched stigma in Senegalese society was even acknowledged in 2007, when then-President Abdoulaye Wade publicly urged mothers to stop “encouraging their children to brave dangers in search of fortune in Europe” (Bouilly, 2008:16). Mother Courage, who lost her son during an attempted journey to Europe, vividly recalls the weeks and months after his death, sharing the reality of this blame:

“It is extremely hard for women in this patriarchal community to lose a man. I was even stigmatised, with people saying that mothers push their sons to go, no matter the conditions of the journey. They say it’s women who push young men to leave, that it’s women who finance their journeys!”

Blame is closely tied to cultural expectations that a mother’s success is measured by the socio-economic achievements of her children, particularly her sons, who remain part of the family and contribute to its welfare (Bouilly, 2016). As explored in Chapter IV, where mobility is embedded in family strategies, a son’s migration to Europe is often viewed as a means to elevate the family’s social standing. For Mother Courage, this dynamic is especially evident within polygamous households, still common in Senegal, where she explains that, once a son settles in Europe, “the mother is better considered within the household, compared to the other co-wives.” In families where fathers support multiple wives and children under conditions of limited resources and heightened competition, a mother’s encouragement for her son to move to Europe can be driven both by rivalry with co-wives seeking greater status and by the hope to improve economic security for herself and her children (Sow, Eldiario.es, 2019).

However, this stigma is not confined to polygamous families. More broadly, mothers face gendered blame regardless of family structure. Mother Hope reflects on the entrenched social expectation that mothers bear primary responsibility for their children’s upbringing: “Here in Senegal when a child succeeds, people say that the mother has fulfilled her mission, she has succeeded. However, if the child fails, all the responsibility falls on the mother.”

The gendered nature of this blame is evident in how quickly fault is assigned:

“Most people, whenever there is a problem, especially with children, but not only, they immediately place the blame on the woman. No matter

the issue, blame is always placed onto women, saying that it's women who cause these problems, that it's women who send their children on the journey, or that women take their money and give it to their children so they can leave."

This burden of blame often becomes not only a social but also an emotional isolation. Mother Hope recounts how, after her son's death, she withdrew from daily life, feeling marked and shamed by her community: "I was afraid every time I stepped outside. When I crossed paths with someone, I felt as though I carried bad luck with me. For three months after my son's death, I lived in that state."

Her experience illustrates how mothers who lose sons to migration are not only expected to endure grief, but also to carry the added weight of public judgment. Yet, for Mother Hope, such accusations are profoundly unjust. She rejects the notion that mothers selfishly push their children to migrate for personal gain, stressing instead the collective dimensions of both loss and success. "When a child leaves and succeeds," she insists, "he doesn't succeed just for his mother, he succeeds for the whole family." Her reflection challenges the individualisation of blame placed on women and highlights the broader family and societal aspirations that shape decisions around mobility.

All in all, these testimonies reveal that mobility practice is not only enacted by those who move but is also intergenerationally and relationally embodied, shaping the lives and bodies of those left behind. Its affective and corporeal dimensions leave a strong mark on the emotional, physical, and social worlds of those who stay. For mothers in particular, this embodiment takes the form of waiting, mourning, and coping, often under conditions of silence, isolation, uncertainty, and blame. Gendered stigmatisation, evident in the ways women are kept in the dark about departure plans, dismissed for expressing concern, and then held accountable, adds to their suffering and reflects deeply rooted cultural norms that tie maternal identity to both moral responsibility and family success. Women's narratives of coping reveal how grief becomes inscribed on the body: through somatic distress, the inability to cry, shame, withdrawal from public life, visions and prophetic dreams. These embodied responses point to how mobility in contexts marked by the border violence becomes a lived experience not limited to those who move but shared across kinship.

The Material Burden of the Left Behind: Hardship, Responsibility and Resilience

Border deaths are not only experienced as profound emotional losses, as discussed above, but also as critical shocks, impacting livelihoods and household dynamics. Here, mobility practice is embodied not only in the emotions that follow loss and absence, but also in the very material consequences borne by those left behind, where the effects of deaths are not only affective, but also reshape the household's economic functioning. As explored in Chapter IV, this is not surprising: it is often those who feel the heaviest weight of familial responsibility, frequently the first-born sons, who undertake the dangerous journey to Europe. When such a person dies, the household loses not only a beloved family member, but also a primary breadwinner and often the head of the household. Women are often left to bear the dual burden of grief and heightened responsibility, becoming the ones most materially impacted by such losses.

Sama, a woman in her fifties and the second wife of her late husband, exemplifies this reality. Her eldest son, Aboubacar, was the main support of the household, selling clothes and small goods to help her mother make ends meet every afternoon after school. One morning, Aboubacar left for class and never came back. Days later, Sama heard that his pirogue had caught fire just off the coast. Some passengers survived, but Aboubacar was not among them. "A man's death greatly increases women's vulnerability," she tells me, recalling the months following her son's disappearance as marked by a deep scarcity of resources, when she had to struggle even to prepare a meal for her children:

"Because men are supposed to be the family's supporters. Our society is structured like this: it is the man who is responsible for taking care of the family by going to work. When a man leaves, it means that the head of the household is gone, and his family can find themselves in very complicated situations. This leads to cases of vulnerability that women go through due to the men's departure."

In her polygamous household, Aboubacar had come to replace his deceased father as a central economic support. Sama described him with pride as the *soutien de la famille*, the pillar of the household. "When school was over, he would sell all kinds of items, and the money he earned, he would hand it to me," she says recalling how he would hand over the earnings to support his siblings' education. Rather than keeping any of the money for himself, he

insisted it be used for school supplies, assuring his mother that he would manage on his own. “Aboubacar was wise. He brought home everything he earned,” she says. In losing him, Sama not only lost a son, but also the vital economic support around which her family’s fragile balance revolved.

In many families, when sons or husbands either migrate or die, women quietly step into the role of head of household. As noted in studies of women’s changing roles in Senegal (Dianka, 2015), this shift often takes place without formal recognition, as publicly acknowledging such changes could disrupt prevailing gender norms. Still, for many women, the death of a male breadwinner becomes a pivotal moment that forces a reassessment of their social position and compels them to assume roles traditionally reserved for men. While painful, this shift can also spark new forms of agency. Mother Hope, for instance, shared how the death of her eldest son forced her into the role of household provider, especially after her husband, once a fisherman, could no longer work consistently. “Since the tragedy, I’ve adopted *une posture d’homme* (a man’s posture).” she tells me. She recalls how, as a young girl, she had always preferred “boys’ tasks,” often accompanying her father at sea. “You can ask the people here,” she tells me with a suffocating laugh, “I used to go fishing with my father! He taught me everything about the sea. He was a respected fisherman and even showed me the direction of the Canary Islands, pointing toward the horizon.”

After marriage and five children, Mother Hope stopped fishing and turned to the domestic life of a wife. But everything changed when her firstborn passed away. Her husband gradually stopped working after losing both his pirogue and engine. Determined not to let the family collapse, Mother Hope used her savings to help buy him a new engine and later a boat, but the fishing business no longer yielded returns. At the point, she decided to take matters in her own hand:

“I take care of everything now. You see? I’ve always preferred doing men’s work. That’s why I say I have the character of a man. Any task that men do, building, working, I can do it. Yes, the father remains the father; he has authority, because that’s our reality here. But for me, men and women are almost the same. It’s true that physical strength and authority were given to men by God. Still, a woman must fight; she must be active and vigilant, especially for her children.”

For Mother Hope, watching over her children means more than fulfilling a mother’s traditional caregiving roles and includes paying school fees, buying

supplies, and ensuring their material security: “Imagine a child needing something for school, and the father says he has no money. That can’t happen! So I have to make sure they always have what they need.”

To do so, Mother Hope works tirelessly, selling fabrics, homemade soaps, ice, and other goods to her neighbours. Her story, like those of many women I met, pushes back, even if subtly, against dominant gender norms. While she still speaks of male authority with respect, her everyday life since the death of her son destabilises the notion that economic provision is an exclusively male domain.

Wives, like mothers, face increased vulnerability when their husbands disappear or die. Often younger and caring for small children, they find themselves in complex situations, navigating life within the household of in-laws, sometimes alongside co-wives. For some, the material impact of loss prompts them to reconsider the marriage; for others, it may lead to remarrying within the husband’s family, a practice common in Wolof-Senegalese contexts (Diop, 2012:47). Still, for some women, this loss can become a trigger for new forms of agency.

Awa, a woman in her twenties with two young children, recounts how her husband, Lamine, attempted to reach Europe twice since their marriage, both times without telling her. The first time he left, a few days later, Lamine returned and admitted, almost casually, that their pirogue had been intercepted at sea. Awa didn’t press him for details: “When he came back, I already knew deep down that he had left, but I chose not to confront him. I just said, ‘You left in peace and returned in peace,’ and we never spoke of it again.”

As time passed, she noticed his growing restlessness, long silences, and scattered conversations hinting at dissatisfaction. One evening, he told her: “Awa, I no longer feel at ease in Senegal. I have no work here, and I can’t provide for the family anymore.” Awa took it as a warning, but didn’t believe he would actually leave again, until he did. This time, Lamine’s pirogue was intercepted near Mauritania and Morocco, and he was imprisoned for several weeks. During this time, Awa had no news of him and thought he was dead. The burden of their two children and the in-laws fell completely on her:

“What hurt the most, was knowing that my husband left without a word, leaving behind his children and me. It felt like a deep betrayal. [...] If something had happened to him, I knew I would be the one left to deal with all of it. Do you understand? All the pressure and the demands were

placed on me. He left without realising what he was leaving behind, but I understood it all too well!”

Awa recalls feeling conflicted, torn between the desire to leave her husband’s home and return to her mother’s house with her children, and the responsibilities she felt as a wife. In the end, it was her mother-in-law’s illness, her sense of duty, and the fear of what others might think that made her stay. While her husband was away, she took on extra tasks both inside and outside the home, struggling to find the money needed to keep the household running. When Lamine finally returned, she was able to rely on him again as the family’s main provider.

When a husband dies at sea, the structural consequences can be even more severe, especially for young wives. In the absence of economic and social support, women are often compelled to remarry within the husband’s family to avoid stigma and provide for their children. Yacine, a woman in her early twenties from a rural village in Kaolack, experienced this firsthand. Her husband, who worked in Dakar, left unexpectedly. Days later, she learned he had attempted to reach Spain by boat, but his pirogue never arrived. When I meet her, Yacine is living with her in-laws and has been married off to her late husband’s older brother. Her grief is still raw. “Every time I look at my children,” she tells me, her voice cracking, “I see him. I can’t help it.” As we talk, a man from the household interrupts us and explains: “You see, she’s still young. When a young woman like her loses her husband, it becomes a problem. People start talking, saying she’s not a good woman, that she’s a witch or a demon. They might even blame her for his death.” In his view, remarrying within the family helped prevent such accusations and allowed her to stay with her children: “She needs him, since she is young... She needed to remarry to stay with the family, so that she can stay here with her kids, give them a future and have a husband.”

While the death of a husband can lead to difficult consequences, as in the cases of Awa, who contemplated divorce, and Yacine, who was forced to remarry, for others it can become a catalyst for agency and female empowerment. Coumba, a woman in her forties who lost her husband about ten years before, recalls how the first weeks and months were incredibly difficult. Like many women in her situation, she was left alone to bear the pain and care for her children and in-laws. Yet after a while, she realised she could no longer remain confined to the home and felt compelled to take action. “In my household, women weren’t used to going out to work. I was the first to venture into selling fish after my husband passed away at sea. I had to do something,” she says,

recalling both the difficulties and the judgmental looks she received when entering fishing, a field traditionally dominated by men. For Coumba, this work was not only a means of survival but also the opportunity to pursue a job she had longed for: “When he was alive, my husband had a lot of compassion for women. He never wanted me to work. He barely tolerated the idea of me doing small trade, but going out to sea...that was out of the question!” She remembers how her husband used to say that women who work were always exhausted and that he felt sorry for them, so he told her to stay home and use the money he would give her instead. For Coumba, the death of her husband meant confronting the material burdens left by him, but also breaking free from the restrictions he imposed. By entering a business traditionally considered masculine, she not only ensured the survival for her and her children, but also claimed a form of empowerment that reshaped her role within the household.

The stories of Sama, Mother Hope, Awa, Yacine, and Coumba illustrate how mobility practice is experienced as embodied materiality, where loss shapes the social realities women live. The death of a son or husband forces women to take on new responsibilities, endure economic hardship, and carry the weight of maintaining family stability. This transforms their economic and social positions, forcing them to renegotiate their roles amid scarcity, vulnerability, and shifting gendered societal and family dynamics.

Women’s Collectives: Stories of Endurance

This second part of the chapter explores how some women transform the experiences of grief, loss, pain, blame, and economic hardship described in the previous section into sources of female empowerment and visibility through the creation of women’s collectives. Theoretically, it illustrates how mobility practice in its embodied dimensions can become a catalyst for mobility practice as political, as women turn personal experiences into collective forms of resilience, navigating the violence of the border regime in nuanced and strategic ways. This shift will be explored through the stories of two women, Mother Courage and Mother Hope, whose embodied experiences of loss introduced in the previous section, here acquire a new political meaning. Mother Hope’s and Mother Courage’s sons, whose departures are exactly fifteen years apart, symbolise how the aspirations of new generations from two economically marginalised coastal areas in Senegal, and the hardships their

mothers continue to endure, have remained tragically unchanged over the past two decades.

Mother Courage lives in a village in the outskirts of Dakar, significantly affected by the fishing crises (see Chapter I). In her village, traditional fishing and agriculture have sharply declined over the past two decades. Industrial pollution and the exploitation of marine resources by foreign vessels have severely undermined local livelihoods, making it increasingly difficult to sustain a living through artisanal fishing. As a result, since the early 2000s, young people and fishermen have increasingly turned to the Atlantic as a route toward a different future. Mother Courage's son was part of this first generation of Atlantic crossings from Senegal's fishing communities. When he was swallowed by the ocean, Mother Courage was just one among many women in her community who faced this loss. "I only had one son," she explains, "it was incredibly difficult for me, and the other mothers in the community." During that period, the village experienced daily departures and many young people lost their lives, leaving a generation of grieving mothers. In the days and weeks that followed his disappearance, Mother Courage found herself trapped in a heavy silence. Like many women I met, she struggled to leave her home, overcome by an unbearable void mingled with guilt and shame. Yet, it was within a space of bereavement that the idea of the collective first emerged:

"In the midst of my pain and sadness, the tragedy sparked something within me. The loss gave me courage and strength, allowing me to speak out for the first time. It gave me the chance to ensure that the voices of women in our community were finally heard."

As we speak, Mother Courage reflects on the pain of losing a man in a society where "men hold all the power," and where women are often blamed and held responsible for the decisions their sons made. "As mothers, we all shared this vulnerability," she says. As a reaction to a shared loss, Mother Courage began reaching out to other mothers in her neighbourhood and founded the "Collective of Women Against Clandestine Migration."

When I arrived in Senegal, I had already heard about Mother Courage through mutual acquaintances in Italy and planned to connect with her. Once in Dakar, I quickly realised that nearly everyone involved in migration work knew of her. Her reputation, however, varied widely among European and Senegalese researchers, journalists, and NGO workers alike. Some described her as a long-standing presence in the field, known for her fight against so-called clandestine

migration. The very name of the collective, which explicitly signals opposition to “clandestine migration,” publicly aligns Mother Courage’s organisation with dominant narratives that criminalise unauthorised mobility. Others, more critically, portrayed her as someone who had just followed the money, largely benefiting from European-funded programs aimed at discouraging unauthorised migration. Yet for others, she was first and foremost a grieving mother whose personal loss had led her to speak out. During the so-called “cayuco-boat crisis” in the early 2000s, her position of stark opponent of unauthorised departures contributed to the collective’s rapid rise in visibility and early media success (c.f. Bouilly 2008). However, this success drew criticism both from those who sought similar recognition in her community, and from others who dismissed her as a passive reproducer of externally imposed discourses. When I first met with a male-led association of returnees in her town and asked about her, my questions were quickly met with skepticism and reluctance, revealing underlying tensions and disagreements regarding her work and approach. Yet, when I finally met her, it became clear that her vision and approach was far more layered than I heard. Far from being a passive mouthpiece for donor agendas, Mother Courage demonstrates a remarkable capacity to navigate multiple narratives around migration and borders, adapting her framing strategically depending on her interlocutor, switching registers in response to different audiences. As I will explore in greater depth later, she is able to mobilise the dominant rhetoric that criminalises irregular departure, while at the same time offering a critical reading of the very narratives she invokes.

Mother Hope lives in a modest neighbourhood by the seaside of a coastal town some kilometres southeast of Dakar. Her family has relied on fishing for generations, but this way of life is now under serious threat due to the decreasing availability of fish (see Chapter I). The area where she lives is made up of unfinished houses built with bare cement blocks. Along the shore, plastic waste is mixed with old fishing nets, a sign of both pollution and the struggles of the fishing community. Just nearby is an affluent tourist area of leisure, where the beaches are clean and well-kept, and wealthy visitors, mostly European, relax at seaside resorts, eating freshly caught fish served right on the sand. It is from these same beaches that many young people from the town set out in boats, hoping to reach Europe. One of them was Mother Hope’s son who disappeared in 2020 during an attempted journey to Spain. Shortly after, another son left and successfully reached Spain. I quickly realise that Mother Hope does not like to speak openly about her son’s death, as she only alludes to it vaguely while showing me some photos of him. Instead, she prefers to

speak about her work, and how her pain became the catalyst for founding her collective:

“What drove me to create the collective was the unbearable pain I carried every day after losing my son during his journey. I wouldn’t want any other mother to go through what I experienced. That’s why I felt compelled to help others facing the same grief.”

She describes how, in the beginning, the loss was unbearably hard and she withdrew from the world around her, only to eventually find the courage to reach out to other women:

“But eventually, I found the courage to overcome my fear and reach out. I realised I wasn’t alone, this was a collective issue that touched all of us women. Losing a child at sea was not just my tragedy; it affected entire families and communities in the village.”

Just like Mother Courage, she started to gather with women across the neighbourhood who had similar experiences of loss within their families. “It is our suffering and desperation from what we experienced that first brings us women together,” she explains. Some months after her son disappeared she created the “Collective of Mothers Victims of Clandestine Migration.” Unlike Mother Courage’s group, which openly positions itself in the fight against so-called clandestine migration, Mother Hope’s collective adopts a more nuanced stance, emphasising the suffering of mothers as victims without directly criminalising migration itself. Furthermore, her collective publicly adopts a critical stance toward harsh border policies, as evidenced by its participation in events criticising European and Senegalese migration policies. Over time, she also established close ties with Senegalese and transnational organisations known for their direct opposition to European border externalisation and active advocacy, solidifying the collective’s position as sympathetic to broader struggles against restrictive migration regimes. At the same time, however, Mother Hope also demonstrated the ability to navigate different discursive registers. While her collective openly participates in advocacy campaigns for freedom of movement, she is occasionally supportive of awareness-raising initiatives aimed at discouraging so-called “irregular” migration, at times adopting the same criminalising rhetoric of most donors. Her shifting position reflects the complex terrain in which women like her and Mother Courage operate, actively negotiating their own values and ideas alongside grief, pressing needs, and the expectations of their partners both locally and internationally.

While their contexts and positions slightly differ, both collectives share a common goal: to give visibility to women's experiences within the journeys of their sons and husbands, and to translate this visibility into a renewed role for themselves and for women in their communities, both socially and economically. Although their activities differ somewhat, partly because one collective has a longer history and therefore greater access to social and financial capital, both engage in similar kinds of work. A key initiative is the creation of safe spaces where women can come together to share their experiences, discuss challenges, and support one another for both what concerns migration-related issues but also other topics, such as gender issues or health issues. Beyond this form of support, the collectives organise income-generating activities to help women sustain their households. These range from occasional small-scale activities, such as producing and selling handmade food items, locally crafted soaps, and agricultural or fishing supplies, to more structured development projects aimed at generating longer-term sources of income. Such activities largely depend on available resources, mostly coming from external donors. Finally, the collectives actively engage in public events, campaigns, and advocacy efforts centred on migration and border violence, albeit sometimes form radically different ideological positions. Through these advocacy efforts, they work to make visible the often-overlooked stories of women left behind, at times advocating for fairer border policies, other times engaging in awareness-raising campaigns.

While both collectives primarily target women, reflecting a broader pattern observed in the literature in similar contexts (cf. Garnaoui 2022), they also witness occasional participation from fathers and men. However, this engagement is often secondary. In conversations with both collectives, it became clear that participation follows a gender pattern: men are more likely to attend public events, particularly those that are more large-scale, or highly visible, whereas they tend to show little interest in the more intimate, regular activities held by the collectives. This gendered dynamic reflects a broader pattern in how mobility practice functions politically for families and communities: as we will see in Chapter VIII, public performances of activism and rights-claiming around mobility tend to be male-led, while more relational, care-based, and community-oriented forms of political practice, like those fostered by Mother Courage's and Mother Hope's collectives, are predominantly female-driven.

Finally, a defining feature of both collectives is the central role of motherhood as a shared identity, which underpins their legitimacy and grants them visibility

and recognition within socially accepted gender roles. In these collectives, motherhood functions as a socially constructed identity that extends beyond biological reproduction, encompassing sisters and wives. In the Senegalese context, where a woman's social value is culturally linked to her reproductive capacity (Bop 1995) and where mothers play a central role in the social reproduction of both family and community structures (Diop 1963), the maternal role holds deep cultural resonance (Diop 2012). By embracing this role as a collective one, rooted in care, responsibility, and intergenerational continuity, the collectives transcend the often limiting and subordinate positions traditionally associated with being a wife or a woman (Semley 2013), instead allowing women to assert a collective political voice through an identity deeply valued in local cultural and social norms. As such, the collectives exemplify what scholars have termed "maternalism" or "public motherhood": the strategic mobilisation of maternal identity to assert political agency and influence public discourse through the moral authority of care (Semley 2013; Prasch 2015). By centring the experiences of Mother Hope and Mother Courage within their collectives, the chapter explores how the embodied experience of losing a loved one at the border gives rise to mobility practice as a political act that forges spaces of solidarity, negotiation, and advocacy grounded in the figure of the grieving mother. These women transform personal grief into a shared political language, recognising the power of their suffering and mobilising it as a catalyst for change in several ways that will be explored below.

Tontines: Collective Care and Female Empowerment

As we sit on the terrace of her house overlooking the sea, cleaning the fish to sell at the market, Mother Courage asks me to take some money from her desk inside since her hands are covered in fish scales. It is Friday, the day they collect money for the *tontine*. "In our collective, we supported the idea that women should engage in economic activities," she explains, "so we set up our own autonomous financing system because we don't have access to the traditional banking system." Mother Courage describes how women within the collective mobilise resources according to each other's capacities through *tontines*, popular financial arrangements in French-speaking African countries, rooted in precolonial societies and predating the advent of money (Kane 2002). This system relies on the rotational and egalitarian exchange of goods, services, or money within a group bound by family, neighbourhood, or professional ties (Diagne 2013). It is characterised by resource redistribution

and the right of every member to receive help in times of need (Sarr 2016). “Some women contribute to our collective fund every month, every day, or every week, depending on the model chosen and each woman’s ability,” Mother Courage explains. “For example, those who work in the market and sell daily could set up daily contributions, but not everyone has cash every day. In our case, we establish both weekly and monthly systems. The weekly one happens on Fridays.”

The money pooled by the collective is used to ease the financial burdens women face after losing someone in their family. Hardships arise both immediately after the tragedy, such as the inability to afford funeral or memorial costs, and in the long term, when women struggle to meet basic household expenses. “In our system, it’s about solidarity,” Mother Courage continues, “we pool funds together, then hold a lottery, and the winner, which changes every month, uses the funds for her family’s needs, like children’s education, health, or household expenses. Our monthly system is a bit more...capitalist.” She stifles a slight laugh when pronouncing the word *capitalist* and explains that for the monthly system they sell shares, each costing 500 francs²⁸ to keep it affordable, pooling the funds to offer loans that are repaid the following months with an interest collectively agreed upon by the women. In a context where access to the formal banking system remains out of reach for many, especially for women whose economic activities often fall outside state-regulated markets, such grassroots financial systems offer a practical and trusted alternative. Mother Courage is clear about the value of this approach for the collective. Unlike a bank, she explains, their system keeps the money circulating within the community and ensures that the benefits return directly to the women themselves:

“At the bank, interest rates are imposed, but here, we calculate our own interest, and at the end of the year, we distribute the profits based on share ownership. It’s a better system than the bank! In traditional banks, interest goes to the institution. But here, women gain financial literacy, they understand risk, credit, and where their money is going.”

Beyond access to credit, Mother Courage emphasises how participating in the *tontine* helps women acquire new skills and forms of knowledge that make them more confident and competitive, whether in managing household finances or navigating trade and small-scale commerce. Importantly, as Mother Courage points out, the *tontine* is more than just a savings mechanism,

²⁸ Approximately 1€

it is a distinctly gendered space. Rooted in everyday practices of solidarity and care, it is predominantly run by women and widely recognised as a key tool for female empowerment in Senegal (Diagne 2013). “The *tontine* system is mainly a female system because here, men don’t like to organise among themselves,” she says, raising her eyes to the sky with a theatrical grimace, her face mimicking a kind of resigned disbelief. “Men are leaders! Solidarity doesn’t exist among men. They are leaders, they are leaders, they are leaders,” she repeats, the words dripping with irony. “So, it’s every man for himself. But women, women are better organised in Senegal than men, in all areas. And they know how to work together.” As a form of mutual care, the *tontine* allows women not only to support one another financially, but also to build emotional and practical networks of reciprocity that strengthen their collective resilience in the face of loss, economic precarity, and social marginalisation.

The same system described by Mother Courage is also central to the functioning of Mother Hope’s collective. Standing in her small kitchen, Mother Hope, Diarré (another woman of her collective), and I prepare the midday meal together as Diarré speaks about the struggle of coping with the loss of the family’s breadwinner. Her toddler son, barely able to walk, crawls around our feet, inching dangerously close to the open fire. While I keep casting anxious glances at the child, Diarré remains remarkably composed, stirring the pot calmly. She tells me that she had lost her brother at sea when she was still young and that her husband left for Libya in hopes of reaching Italy, and that she is now raising her young son alone. Diarré lives just next door to Mother Hope and has accompanied her throughout the tragedy of her son’s disappearance, witnessing both her grief and her strength firsthand. When Mother Hope asked her to become the vice-president of the collective, she did not hesitate. As we talk about the work of the collective, Diarré places great emphasis on the lack of financial support and on how mobilising collective resources is crucial. Without mutual support, the reach of the collective remains severely limited, as none of the women involved have stable incomes. *Tontines*, she explains, play a vital role in stepping in when a woman in the group is in crisis, especially in the aftermath of loss. For Diarré this is a form of relational care central to how the collective operates:

“Having this collective can allow us to support and help each other as women. If one of us has something to settle, or if she has problems, or if she is sick or mourning, we will make contributions, or go to the savings fund, take an amount, and give it to her, discreetly, so no one knows.”

This careful discretion protects women's dignity while addressing immediate needs. "If one of the women of the collective falls ill and the hospital prescribes some medicines, she comes to see me about her issue," Mother Hope adds, suggesting that beyond the monetary value, which is often insufficient to meet all pressing needs, the act itself becomes a form of collective care:

"For example, in the case of Yacine, who just lost her child, if she needs 50,000 CFA²⁹, we could take 25,000 CFA³⁰ for the common funding and give it to her as support, so she can use it to find some comfort, buy a sack of rice and oil. This money is to help those who lose a child and find themselves in a vulnerable situation."

Financial aid becomes a concrete expression of relational support where care circulates among women. In the aftermath of a loss, when grief makes it difficult to work or even ask for help, the *tontine* allows the collective to act pre-emptively, stepping in without the woman needing to make a request:

"When a mother just received the tragic news, we collect an amount of money and give it to her, because a woman who is grieving cannot go out on the street to ask for help, and she cannot work either; she needs time to rest. But during this rest period she still needs to eat, feed her children and pay household expenses. So, with the small amount we gather, she can buy some food to eat and also address other issues that cannot wait, like rent, medicines etc."

Tontines and other forms of mutual solidarity function as critical sites of political agency within women's collectives, constituting mobility as a political practice. They do so by transforming economic support into collective care, enabling women to sustain themselves and their families amid structural precarity and loss. These financial networks also foster women's financial literacy and economic empowerment, offering pathways, albeit limited, to economic emancipation and autonomy.

²⁹ Approximately 75€

³⁰ Approximately 40€

Navigating Narratives: Mobilising Motherhood, Performing Victimhood

While *tontines* and grassroots mutual aid provide vital support, they remain insufficient to fully address the extensive financial and structural challenges women face. Consequently, the collectives have increasingly tried to attract the growing influx of external funding opportunities. Since the 2000s, as Europe has intensified efforts to manage migration “at its source”, Senegal has become a key recipient of funding linked to the so-called “fight against irregular migration.” This has fuelled a migration industry shaped by soft forms of border externalisation and policy-driven development agendas. In this context, women’s collectives seek to position themselves as legitimate recipients of aid by navigating donor priorities and expectations, as Diarré explains:

“After all the tragedies we’ve witnessed here, we thought, why not create an association to gather requests for help? We also need resources to assist. We need donors who come to support us. Because every month, we make contributions, but they are not enough.”

During my time in Senegal, Mother Hope and Diarré were in the process of formalising the collective into a legally registered association. As we review the registration paperwork, Mother Hope emphasises that this step is essential for accessing funding and implementing meaningful projects for the women in her community. Becoming a formal association would allow them to access European grants, typically channelled through international donors, NGOs or Senegalese government programs. For both Mother Courage and Mother Hope, therefore, establishing a collective also serves as a way to claim space in a competitive development-aid landscape dominated by male-led organisations, such as associations of returnees or families of the missing, which have increasingly become the main recipients of European funding to implement non-openly coercive migration management projects.

Mother Hope openly complains about how women in her area have long been exploited by male-led organisations, and how this exploitation motivated her to create her own collective. She explains that many local associations regularly mobilise women to fulfil gender quotas required by European NGOs or to align with donor-driven agendas around the feminisation of migration. Women are invited to provide testimonies or participate in project activities, she tells me, but rarely see any of the funding that flows through these initiatives. When Mother Hope realised that women like her, wives and

mothers of the missing, were being exploited for profit, she saw an opportunity to organise differently:

“There was a time when Abdul [the president of a returnee association] or people like him would call us [women] for activities and things like that... But when I finally realised that these people were exploiting us, I decided to take my destiny into my own hands. I thought to myself, why not create my own women’s organisation?”

By founding her own collective, Mother Hope understood that she could channel resources directly to the women, bypassing male-led organisations that had long monopolised access to funding and visibility. A similar dynamic exists in the village where Mother Courage’s collective is based. In this particular case, the unequal allocation of funding and the growing popularity of the women’s collective created a rift within the community, leaving male-led returnee associations feeling marginalised and overlooked, and creating tensions. This dynamic, similar to the one described above in relation to the “professional returnee,” has also been observed in other contexts and can be understood as a spillover effect of border policies, which generate limited opportunities and tensions within communities (Andersson 2014; Bouilly 2016; Magallanes-Gonzalez 2020).

While the extent to which all members of the collectives equally benefit from EU funding remains unclear, securing external funding from an extremely competitive industry is central to how the collectives operate. To achieve this, the collectives often have to align their priorities with those of the EU border regime. A central element of this fundraising strategy in both collectives is how women leverage their identities as mothers, by drawing on the vulnerability and moral authority associated with this role to appeal to European donors, strategically invoking the perceived link between motherhood and unauthorised departures. This operates in two ways: first, through the image of the mother as a victim of migration, enduring the pain of losing her children; and second, through the figure of the mother who influences her sons’ decisions to migrate, either by encouraging them to go or persuading them to stay. These images of motherhood activate both the humanitarian and securitarian rationales underlying EU border externalisation policies based on the “root causes” approach. On one hand, by portraying mothers as victims, they feed into a broader narrative that stopping migration “at its source” with harder border policies will protect families and communities from the trauma of losing their youth. On the other hand, by positioning mothers as influential actors capable of shaping their children’s

migration decisions, they support the idea that addressing specific push factors within the communities of origin can reduce departures.

In this context, regardless of their personal views on the border regime, mothers must navigate and at times comply with the logics of EU border externalisation in order to secure access to a small part of the resources it generates. By strategically positioning themselves as ideal interlocutors for projects aimed at curbing migration “at its source,” their collectives become preferred recipients of border externalisation funding, particularly for awareness-raising campaigns. This intention is explicit in the name of Mother Courage’s collective, “Collective of Women Against Clandestine Migration,” which deliberately exploits the image of mothers as key influencers in their children’s migration decisions. Aligning with European migration agendas has greatly benefited her group in terms of social capital, increasing their visibility and potentially securing additional funding, as her collective has received several visits from European and Senegalese officials. Over the years, Mother Courage has become a symbol to the “fight against irregular migration”: she has been invited to speak at public hearings organised by the European Parliament on topics such as “addressing the root causes of migration from developing countries,” she features in UN Women, and she even has a dedicated biographical page on the EU Parliament website. There, her mission is described as “curbing illegal immigration” by “engaging mothers of would-be immigrants in anti-illegal immigration endeavours,” through efforts to replace the “myths of emigration” as a path to prosperity with the “harsh reality” of the journey and life in Europe.

Publicly, Mother Courage fully embraces this narrative, acknowledging that while mothers may push their sons to migrate, they can reposition themselves by altering their attitudes and behaviours. This dual role is powerfully illustrated in a talk Mother Courage delivered in French aimed at European audiences:

“When our children disappeared at sea, people said that it was the women who had encouraged or even financed their sons’ departure. I say yes. Why? Because when a son leaves for Europe, no matter how he manages to travel, as soon as he starts sending money back to his family, his mother is held in higher regard than the other wives in the polygamous household. That is why we encourage or finance our sons, to gain honor within the family and even within the community [...] and it was through realising this that I began engaging in awareness-raising activities.”

Within this logic, Mother Courage presents mothers as morally responsible for their children's migration decisions: they are seen as "bad" and opportunistic if believed to encourage migration, but "good" when they actively dissuade it. In continuing her talk, Mother Courage repositions mothers as agents of change in the fight against irregular migration, reinforcing the idea that they can serve as preferred interlocutors capable of reversing migration trends:

"We mothers have changed our mind by engaging in this struggle [against clandestine migration], raising awareness, and carrying out educational campaigns to say no to young people leaving by pirogue or on foot toward Europe [...] We have seen many results! We have seen great results because, in this patriarchal community, a son is very close to his mother. When we, as women, are given the right to speak, boys listen to us, men listen to us. That is why departures from our coasts have now decreased."

While the collective has had little impact on reducing actual departures, the narrative of the mother who has come to understand the risks of migration and now seeks to educate her sons and other youth has become firmly established, and is deeply embedded within the European funding landscape connected to migration management. Ironically, the very success of the collective, meaning a real reduction in unauthorised departures, would work against the women's own interests, since their visibility, influence, and access to funding depend on the continued European investment in this area.

Operating under similar logics and largely reinforcing the idea of mothers as morally authoritative figures capable of dissuading departures, Mother Hope's collective also achieved relative success, more than fifteen years after Mother Courage's. On a day when I was visiting her, a French journalist came to interview Mother Hope, in search of an emotive story about the tragedies of irregular migration along the Senegalese coast. Before talking to Mother Hope, the journalist had spent the morning wandering the neighbourhood beach, interviewing fishermen about the scarcity of fish that pushes many to leave. From the very beginning of the conversation, the journalist urged her to speak about the loss of her son, clearly seeking a dramatic angle to frame the article. Yet, as the interview turned toward the work of the collective, Mother Hope repositioned herself: rather than appearing solely as a grieving mother, she spoke as someone with influence, capable of dissuading young people from embarking on the journey. In doing so, she strategically aligned her account with the European narrative of "addressing the root causes," while

simultaneously asserting her own agency over how her story would be told and circulated:

“In the collective, what we discuss most with the other women is how we can help our children move forward in life, so they don’t consider taking a pirogue to Europe. Essentially, it’s about raising awareness so that what happened to us doesn’t happen again [...] I see people still trying to leave, and I try to understand them, advise them, and even call their parents to ask them to speak to their children and tell them not to go”

As she speaks, the journalist scribbles quickly on a notebook, visibly satisfied by Mother Hope’s words. The narrative offers all the elements likely to resonate with a European audience: the dramatic loss of a son, a grieving mother, and the courage to dissuade others from making the same choice. Encounters like this illustrate how, at the same time as these collectives have positioned themselves as privileged interlocutors within the European “root causes” migration framework, they have also gained visibility through mediatization. In my reading, one of the key ways these women’s collectives have been mediatized is through the figure of the mother portrayed simultaneously as victim and heroine. This representation constructs mothers as the ideal subjects for European media consumption, aligning seamlessly with stereotypical and homogenising narratives surrounding both migration and black womanhood (Cornwall 2005). This dynamic is evident in how both Mother Courage and Mother Hope are publicly perceived both as a grieving mother who lost their sons and as figures of resilience, represented in many journalistic accounts on European media as “brave mothers” bearing the heavy responsibility of protecting and saving young people from the dangers of irregular migration. While Mother Courage’s collective received a huge media attention when it was founded nearly two decades ago, strikingly, twenty years later, the same narratives continue to circulate in much the same way. Moreover, although founded more recently, Mother Hope’s collective has attracted similar media attention, which largely reproduce the same narrative of mothers portrayed simultaneously as victims and heroines. “So, we can say you are the collateral victim of clandestine migration?” the journalist asks, his pen already poised above the notebook. Mother Hope does not answer, her expression solemn. The journalist smiles and writes it down anyway. This line will make a perfect headline.

Notably, victimhood is not only attributed to these women by others but is strategically embraced and performed by the mothers themselves as a site of

agency and visibility. This is especially evident in Mother Hope's "Collective of Mothers Victims of Clandestine Migration", where victimhood is explicitly foregrounded even in the group's name. Beyond narrative framing, this embrace of victimhood is enacted in embodied and performative ways. During interactions with journalists and NGOs, women from the collective often embody the role of ideal victims: adopting solemn expressions, holding up photographs of their sons, and sometimes breaking into tears in front of cameras. Journalists frequently stage them in symbolic positions, gazing mournfully at the ocean or standing beside pirogues that recall the journeys their sons never returned from, transforming their grief into visual narratives easily consumed by European audiences. This public, and at times performative, display of pain is particularly striking when contrasted with the Senegalese cultural logic of *sutura*, which emphasises restraint, dignity, and emotional composure in the face of hardship, especially in public, as seen earlier. Yet, in front of European audiences, this culturally embedded restraint gives way to a logic where pain must be made visible, where tears are not only accepted but expected.

The strategic leveraging of motherhood exemplifies mobility practice as a political form of action, in which personal grief is reappropriated and consciously laid bare for public consumption to engage European border externalisation logics. In doing so, women attract funding mechanisms and gain visibility through media attention. By embodying the "good mother" figure and embracing performative victimhood, they transform their suffering into a resource that navigates and instrumentalises dominant humanitarian and migration narratives, carving out spaces of autonomy and visibility within oppressive border regimes and patriarchal structures. This form of political mobility does not reject the border regime outright but tactically works within its frameworks to assert agency, attract media attention, and secure material support, thereby reframing pain and vulnerability as political capital in the humanitarian economy of visibility and compassion.

Navigating Narratives: Between Compliance and Critique

As seen above, both collectives strategically engage with the "root causes" framework promoted by European donors, positioning themselves as key interlocutors in efforts to curb migration. Yet, while this could seem a perfect example of co-optation of female empowerment into the state's agenda for migration management, the picture is more nuanced. In fact, this engagement does not prevent Mother Courage and Mother Hope from adopting a critical

stance toward border and migration management, both in public forums and in one-on-one conversations. These two approaches—the cautious, grieving mother co-opted by the EU agenda, who seeks to prevent further loss, and the critical mother, who quietly questions the border regime—are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they exemplify the struggles and power dynamics that emerge in encounters with border externalisation. Mother Courage and Mother Hope actively navigate and negotiate multiple discursive and political registers, carefully balancing their narratives and performances, depending on their interlocutors, prevailing values, and specific moments. This flexible and context-sensitive approach reflects a form of strategic pragmatism that enables them to assert agency within constrained spaces, challenging simplistic portrayals of them either as passive reproducers of externally imposed narratives and puppets of donor agendas, or as heroic fighters against border deaths. Their nuanced approach reveals instead a dynamic and conscious exercise of power.

Mother Hope's approach illustrates this complexity, as she openly aligns her collective with public initiatives opposing the EU border regimes. In 2023 and 2025, for example, she participated in the "Caravan for the Missing" (discussed in Chapter VIII), a movement with a strong political and radical message against border violence and took part in several events to demand the liberalisation of visas. She also became a member of Alarm Phone, a transnational activist network that provides emergency support to migrants in distress at sea along Europe's external borders, and which is known for its uncompromising stance against the EU's border policies. Importantly, associating herself with the no border movement also gives her access to another form of capital in terms of both visibility and potential funding linked to transnational activist networks. For instance, whether she had never been outside of Senegal before, these connections with activist networks have allowed her to travel to events both within Africa and in Europe, where she participates in gatherings and forums. Moreover, in several conversations, Mother Hope also makes clear that her role is not to stop young people from leaving. "It's not my role to denounce departures. I am a mother, and I understand very well the circumstances for why our children leave Senegal..." she tells me, referring not only to the depletion of local fishing resources that has affected her coastal community, but also to the unequal visa agreements that leave young people with few legal options. Recognising that she can do little to prevent these departures, she sees her responsibility more as offering guidance to minimise the risks:

“There was a time when there was a rumour of a pirogue that was supposed to leave from here. When I heard these rumours, I told them, ‘If you want a mother’s advice, stop, wait until next year, and leave then. Right now, the sea is too cold, the waves too unpredictable. And Europe’s border is cold too, you could freeze, or worse. As a mother, for your safety, I advise you to wait.’”

After this conversation the young people dispersed, some returned home, some left. That very night, the pirogue departed, but it never arrived. “They reminded me of when my son left,” she confesses, “he left at that time, and up until now, he still hasn’t returned.” Unlike awareness-raising campaigns that rely on shame, guilt, or fear to deter migration, Mother Hope’s approach is rooted in care. Her advice does not seek to forbid or control, but emerges from empathy, lived experience, and an understanding of the injustices embedded in global mobility systems. As such, regardless of her personal stance toward border policies, the way she navigates different registers and narratives illustrates her strategic engagement with multiple political and discursive fields.

In contrast to the monolithic public image of a staunch opponent of unauthorised migration, Mother Courage also reveals a far more nuanced and politically sophisticated understanding of the border regime. As we talk, I ask her what she thinks about migration policies. Her reply is marked by a lucid awareness of the injustices that shape mobility and the deep structural inequalities between European countries and their former colonies. “To tell the truth, I am not telling everyone, ‘Don’t go to Europe.’ If you want to go, you should have the right to do so,” she says plainly. I point out that her collective publicly advocates against unauthorised departures and ask how she reconciles that stance with what she had just said. She does not seem to be bothered by my question and expands on her perspective. “Well, migration is not a problem for us. The only problem for us is that borders are closed, when they should be open.” I raise my gaze from the bucket full of fish I am cleaning and look up to make sure I heard her correctly. She meets my gaze and repeats, her voice now more forceful, almost imploring: “Borders should be open.” She leans forward, wipes her hand on the cloth, and speaks slowly, as if weighing each word:

“Look, we need to reconsider migration through the lens of open borders. Right now, Europe is stressed about this wave of migration. ‘Secure the borders, secure the borders,’ they say. But secure the borders against whom? Human beings! We are not beasts, we are not dangerous animals. Even I, who am speaking to you now, with three passports full

of Schengen visas, I cannot go to Italy anymore because of bureaucratic hurdles.”

She describes how an Italian NGO has recently invited her to attend a meeting to bring her testimony to a commemoration event in Sicily, but she could not go because her visa has been denied:

“With embassy restrictions, I don’t even have access to the Italian embassy, it’s blocked! All EU embassies are blocked! In my own country, I face borders. To even apply for a visa, they’ve outsourced the process. External agencies are in charge now. They don’t want to deal with us directly. But what about those who never went to school and can’t even read? How are they supposed to get an appointment? And I’m talking just about getting an appointment, not even a visa! It’s an exhausting struggle.”

Her critique, which echoes many of the structural issues discussed in Chapter IV, soon turns to the broader mechanisms of border externalisation.

“On our coasts, we see how people are constantly tracked, monitored, and told: ‘Stay home, stay home.’ But when Europe needed to be built, they came and took many men to construct Europe. And then, once Europe was built, they told us, ‘Stay home.’ This is inhumane.”

She pauses briefly to instruct me to take some of the fish we have been cleaning and lay them out to dry in the sun on the terrace. Then she picks up the thread again:

“Look, I’m not saying that everyone should just go to Europe like that, with the pirogue. But look at those risking their lives to reach Lampedusa or Spain. If they had access to visas, they wouldn’t be taking those dangerous journeys. [...] This is my philosophy on migration: as long as Europe keeps building barricades, people will climb over walls, even electrified ones. Even with barriers, people will find a way. Close the land borders, and people will still leave. Close the maritime borders, and people will still leave. The only solution is to open the borders. That is the real challenge of our time. We need to rethink migration policies to respect human rights. Should migration policies include violence? Is violence part of the solution? If borders keep closing, people will keep trying to open them, no matter the obstacles, no matter the risks.”

While Mother Courage's and Mother Hope's views on borders and migration policies are not always consistent, both demonstrate agency in the ways they navigate and respond to border externalisation and the various industries and narratives it generates, including those of border control as well as the no border movement. In doing so, they render their mobility practice inherently political. By choosing when and how to engage with or critique restrictive border systems, they take control of how im/mobility impacts their lives personally and collectively. Their experiences reveal that their collectives cannot be simply seen in the binary way of either strict enforcers of anti-migration policies or as heroic resisters of an unfair border regime. Instead, their mobility practice takes on political meaning in a space in-between, where women balance the need to work within existing systems to access resources while also quietly challenging the limits set by border regimes.

The Collective as a Proxy to Advance Women's Rights

While these collectives initially arise in response to the emotional and material consequences of losing a son, husband, or family provider, they quickly became more than spaces to address migration and border deaths. They serve as safe spaces where women confront and navigate the persistent everyday violences of a patriarchal society where power remains largely concentrated in men's hands. The creation of the collectives enables women to "enter male-gendered political space as citizens, activists, and leaders, and potentially transform their societies" (Van Allen in Moran 2012: 58), using migration issues as a catalyst to advance broader women's agendas in a way that is not openly disruptive of the existing social order. Although this work does not assess how broadly these gains benefit all women in the collectives, and while leaders like Mother Hope and Mother Courage may benefit far more than others, the central role these collectives assign to women nonetheless represents an important shift that already subtly challenges prevailing masculinist social norms. Through the social and economic capital the collectives have gained, the image of women as leaders is increasingly normalised, opening space for greater gender equality within their communities.

For Mother Courage, centring migration issues to address gender concerns without causing an overt rupture in the system is a deliberate tactic to quietly challenge patriarchal dynamics. She recalls how, through the collective, she purposely seeks to give visibility to women beyond the loss they all experienced, to demonstrate that "women can do everything that men do." She

poses herself as a living example, recounting how, through the fame gained via her collective, she became the first fisherwoman in her village. “This is a role traditionally reserved for men,” she says proudly. “I also created my own mussel farms, where we women cultivate and process the mussels!” For Mother Courage, the creation of the collective was a way to “speak up” and ensure that women’s voices can be heard within the community. “To show, through our activities, that women have an important role to play in society,” she explains, suggesting that, in many ways, the collective acts as a proxy for advancing women’s access to rights. She recounts how, through the initial success of the collective, she and other women from her village were able to bring women together across many other coastal towns: “Through all the activities we carried out, including awareness-raising campaigns, we also held meetings within affected families to try to change the social situation of women in our communities.”

In this way, campaigns aimed at preventing unauthorised departures also function as a strategic cover for raising consciousness about women’s rights within these communities. Moreover, external funds are not only useful to address existing and pressing needs for women who lost their loved ones, but also serve as a way to channel these resources towards broader initiatives aimed at women’s empowerment and autonomy:

“Creating our collective [...] also enabled us to work with development partners and NGOs to create businesses and demonstrate that women can bring local development to the community [...] Through these activities, we have helped integrate many women into small enterprises, including tailoring, dyeing, local grain processing, fishery products, and soap-making.”

Since economic capital often translates into social capital, by attracting funding Mother Courage’s collective has opened doors traditionally closed to women. “Through all these struggles, we, as women, have brought a broader vision, that we want women to be more involved not only within our local communities but also in decision-making bodies,” she tells me with pride, showing me pictures on her phone where she and other women feature alongside men at official events and ceremonies. “You see,” she adds, “I was able to meet with all these traditional authorities so that my voice could be heard, and my name could be registered in the records of our community, where no woman had ever been listed before!” Now, Mother Courage claims she serves as the vice president of the Council of Elders, a body where all major community decisions are made. “It’s almost like being a minister without a

portfolio in a government! It's significant, and it's a step forward," she claims. While she acknowledges facing resistance, both within her own community and at times even within the collective, she insists that the fact that she was able to reach certain roles is "a victory for women as a whole" underscoring how individual achievements can represent broader progress toward gender equality by gradually shifting social norms that have historically marginalised women's leadership.

This quiet subversion of patriarchal dynamics extends beyond the public sphere into the household. When women gather, the collective space transforms into a platform for raising awareness about gender-based issues. "I take advantage of our meetings to carry out activities on reproductive health, migration, and women's rights. These are activities for women, so they also serve as spaces for sharing," she says, emphasising that the collectives are not only spaces for talking about pain and loss, but also for broader conversations beyond migration:

"For example, if I were to say openly one day, 'We gather to talk about domestic violence,' that would not be acceptable. However, through the collective, I can use this opportunity to pass on the message... We can talk safely about issues and things that we might not be able to discuss with our husbands or when they are around."

Similarly, Mother Hope views the creation of collective spaces by women as a powerful source of female empowerment. She recalls how, during their gatherings at her house, women give advice to one another about a whole range of topics, often exceeding migration related ones. Although her collective is relatively young, she has already accessed male-dominated spaces thanks to her leadership role, using this position to advance women's interests, such as securing free vaccinations for their children. "I am currently in discussions with the mayor and the head doctor of the hospital to explore how we could establish a *mutuelle de santé*," she shares enthusiastically, explaining that, unlike other insurances, a mutual health insurance is community-based and would allow women in the collective to contribute according to their possibilities, following a logic similar to the *tontines*. Through this initiative, she explains, women would worry less about their children's health, which often falls primarily on their shoulders. "This would cover 50% of all medical expenses for our children! I'm following up on the necessary steps to set up this insurance, which will allow us to register up to five children per family as beneficiaries!" she claims, her eyes shining. While mutual health insurance may seem unrelated to migration and border deaths directly, Mother Hope's

position as president of the collective gave her access to the social and financial capital needed to pursue this initiative that benefits women in the community more broadly. As she speaks about other members of the collective, she casually remarks that not all women are necessarily victims of “clandestine migration.” Some, she notes, have lost husbands or sons under different circumstances, while others live in situations of general vulnerability. Her observation reveals how a collective that publicly presents itself through the figure of the grieving mother is, in practice, drawing together a broader spectrum of women whose experiences of loss and precarity extend beyond migration alone.

Within the collectives, mobility practice takes on a political dimension in the ways that migration-related experiences serve as a proxy for broader struggles women face in claiming rights and recognition. The collectives become both safe havens for discussing issues otherwise difficult to address openly in society and platforms to advance women’s status within their communities. This is achieved through the powerful image of motherhood, which frames these spaces as innocuous and socially accepted, enabling women to expand their agency and resist oppression within culturally legible boundaries. Through this framing, women transform mobility from an embodied experience into a political act that challenges patriarchal norms and creates new spaces for gender autonomy and social change.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the colonial encounter between border externalisation and the will to move, foregrounding how this encounter reverberates beyond the “migrant figure” to affect those who remain, particularly mothers and, to a lesser extent, wives. By centring the experiences of women who live with the disappearance or death of their loved ones, it challenges narrow framings of mobility that focus solely on those who move, proposing instead a relational understanding of mobility practice. In this framework, mobility is not only about crossing borders but about how those crossings are lived, mourned, and made sense of, within intimate and gendered relations. The chapter argues that mobility must be understood as intergenerational and collective, shaped not only by the act of moving but also by the everyday labour of waiting, grieving, and enduring. In this way, the disappearance of a loved one is not only a rupture, but also a catalyst that reveals the embodied and political nature of grief, care, and endurance within the broader architecture of racialised and gendered border regimes.

Waiting and worrying emerge as expressions of embodied mobility practice that unfolds through the embodied consequences of someone else’s movement. The pain of not-knowing, of being excluded from knowledge or deceived, is a somatic experience lived by mothers and wives through sleepless nights, prophetic dreams, aching bodies, and silences. As the female body manifests loss physically, it is simultaneously subjected to societal expectations of womanhood, dignity, and endurance, compelled to contain grief, bear blame, and perform restraint. At the same time, this embodiment has a material dimension as women bear the economic burden of absence: facing deprivation, pressure to remarry, or the collapse of household structures. Yet within these gendered constraints, some women reclaim agency by becoming providers, rejecting expectations of silent suffering, or even contemplating divorce. In this sense, the loss of a loved one may deepen women’s emotional and economic vulnerability, but it can also act as a driving force of individual transformation that reconfigures gender roles and family dynamics.

As the second part of the chapter explores, individual transformation can also become collective. Women resist and navigate the gendered impacts of border violence by embracing the image of the vulnerable mother through the formation of women’s collectives. Yet, vulnerability should not be mistaken for weakness or passivity; it is also a site of agency where the embodied

dimension of mobility practice takes on a political character aimed at eliciting visibility and attracting attention. In this context, the performance of vulnerability and victimhood through the reappropriation of motherhood constitutes a mobility practice that is political not through direct confrontation with power, but through how it navigates, negotiates, and subtly reclaims the constraints imposed by broader social structures that marginalise and inferiorise women. This transformation of mobility from an embodied practice into a political one demonstrates how women strategically use the consequences of im/mobility to create new opportunities for themselves and their families by positioning themselves as compelling actors in the border industry and attracting financial resources.

At the same time, women's collectives' strategic navigation of multiple registers, articulating multiple, ambiguous, and sometimes seemingly contradictory political claims vis-a-vis the border regime, complicates simplistic views of colonial encounters as one-sided power struggles. While acknowledging the power imbalances between these women and European donors, this chapter challenges the idea of a purely exploitative relationship that strips women of agency and reduces them to mere victims, as well as a pure co-optation of these women into the donor's agenda. Instead, it demonstrates how these women skilfully navigate border externalisation policies and European agendas more broadly to their advantage. At the same time, their legitimisation through external funding allows women not only to secure resources vital for their survival but also to gain status within their societies, climbing social and gender hierarchies, and enacting change within their communities, extending their influence beyond the migration issue alone. This approach highlights how these women balance personal experiences of loss with broader political goals, strategically navigating and subverting traditional gender roles. This, in itself, constitutes a form of political mobility practice that is neither heroic nor spectacular but subtle, relational, at times contradictory, and deeply embedded in everyday negotiations of power and survival. This is especially evident in the case of the two leaders who, through their positions, accumulate both social and economic capital, leveraging their roles to secure visibility, resources, and broader recognition. Importantly, the effects extend beyond the leaders themselves: by occupying public and authoritative roles, these women help shift community expectations and expand the boundaries of what is considered permissible for women, thereby opening space for broader female participation and leadership.

By focusing on the encounter between border externalisation policies and border deaths in gendered ways, this chapter engages with a decolonial feminist approach to border externalisation, centring the voices and experiences of women who have lost their sons, daughters, and husbands due to border violence. It emphasises how women who do not travel are both targeted by and respond to border externalisation policies, challenging masculinist perspectives of border resistance that focus solely on public actions, as well as narratives that portray women who do not travel as passive “left behind” wives or mothers. While these women are indeed embedded in the perverse dynamics of a migration industry that extract value through care and control, they nevertheless are not passive agents in it, but work within and against its constraints. The added value of this perspective is twofold: first, by revealing how gender shapes the colonial encounter between border externalisation and mobility beyond those who cross borders; and second, by illustrating how these women must navigate both the violence of border regimes and patriarchal societal structures, without overt disruption. In this way, it shows how gender simultaneously constrains and enables agency in confronting the deadly violence of border externalisation. This perspective offers a valuable starting point for a decolonial feminist analysis of border externalisation that challenges both the individualism prevalent in studies focusing exclusively on mobility from the perspective of those who move, and the masculinist bias that relegates women who do not travel to secondary or “left behind” roles. By centring these women’s embodied and political mobility practice, the chapter contributes to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of border externalisation as a deeply gendered and relational process.

Chapter VIII: Caravan for the Missing: Contesting Im/mobility

The last rays of the sunset have faded over the village of Gandiol in the north of Senegal, and a few dim lights illuminate several banners attached to the unplastered fence of a house, listing the names of those who disappeared in the Atlantic. Only in the first five months of 2024, an average of 33 people per day are estimated to have died at the Euro-African Western border (Caminando Fronteras 2024), making this border among the deadliest in the world. These disappearances, met with silence on both sides of the border, have become a pervasive everyday reality for Senegalese families. The night is warm, but a fresh breeze blows in from the sea just a few metres away, gently lifting some grains of sand from the ground. Some people pass by and stop briefly to read the long list of names and ask what this is about. Close to the banners, people begin to gather in front of a projection screen, where videos and images will soon be shown. It's a diverse crowd: women, men, and children of all ages. The music starts, and children begin to dance and hum along to a Wolof popular song. The gathering is a commemoration that brings awareness to the tragic deaths at sea, yet the atmosphere feels like a festivity. The first video begins, showing the violence of Moroccan police at the Melilla fence in 2022. The images of brutalised black bodies lying on the ground silence the crowd. Now, the echoes of laughter and song have faded, replaced by an unsettling silence as all eyes are fixed on the images. Saliou, the president of Boza Fii, grabs the microphone, his eyes locked on the screen as his finger points to the images of brutalised black bodies lying on the ground, "We are here to fight against these policies" he says, "the ones that result in the killing of our people at the borders, the ones that turn a blind eye on these forced deaths."

This chapter examines how Senegalese civil society mobilises around border deaths, framing them not as isolated tragedies but as politically charged outcomes of a violent and racialised border regime. These deaths, often rendered invisible or inevitable by "an international regime of impunity"

(Callamard 2017: 21), are deeply embedded in the colonial encounter that continues to shape the relationship between people's mobility and processes of border externalisation. Rather than being passive markers of loss, border deaths can become sites of political agency as they are reclaimed, narrated, and made public as part of a broader struggle for the right to move. Through this lens, the chapter theorises mobility practice as both political and embodied. Politically, it understands mobility as a contested terrain where claims are made, injustices are named, and alternative futures are imagined. Drawing on Verdery's (1999) notion that politics entails bringing issues into the public sphere, it foregrounds how the public discussion of border deaths, and their framing as the consequence of border violence, constitutes a powerful form of mobility as a political practice. Embodiment is equally central: the capacity to mobilise politically around these deaths is rooted in the lived, corporeal experiences of im/mobility of activists who have survived border regimes, and of families who carry the loss of those disappeared or dead.



Figure 2. Evening video projection in Gandiol. Photo courtesy by Boza Fii.

To ground this analysis, the chapter focuses on the “Caravan for the Missing,” a 10-day awareness-raising campaign organised by Boza Fii, a Senegalese organisation composed of volunteer activists and individuals with direct migration experience. The campaign sought to disrupt dominant narratives by connecting border deaths to violent policy regimes, challenging both Senegalese and European official discourses, and demanding justice, accountability, and reparations for the missing and their families. By analysing the narratives shared during the Caravan through public rallies, group discussions, video screenings, workshops, and daily interactions, the chapter

explores how border deaths are politicised and transformed into a collective form of resistance that reclaim the right to move from within the communities most affected.

Events that place border deaths at the centre as a political tool to challenge unequal mobility regimes have received limited attention in the literature on borders and migration (but see Stierl 2016), particularly in contexts outside of Europe, where resources for protest are scarcer and political spaces for dissent more constrained. At the same time, authors have dealt with various initiatives where activists converge at the Euro-African borderlands confronting and contesting border policies (Andersson 2014; Sylla and Schultz 2020, Savio Vammen 2024). Contributing to a deeper understanding of how narratives of death and border violence are shaped and mobilised in regions most affected by externalised borders, this chapter highlights a form of activism rooted in local experience. In contrast to similar initiatives in Europe, which often focus on critiquing EU border policies and raising awareness among European audiences, the Caravan, organised by locals for locals, emerges from within the communities directly impacted. It is driven by individuals who share lived experiences of border deaths with the populations they aim to reach, enabling them to engage these issues with particular resonance and legitimacy, and amplifying the political and emotional force of their claims.

The chapter is structured theoretically around key instances in which mobility practice takes shape as a political and embodied act. It begins by examining how awareness campaigns like the Caravan for the Missing are not aimed at dissuading migration but at informing communities about the deadly consequences of border policies, thereby transforming awareness-raising campaigns into a means of cultivating political consciousness. The second part explores how activists reframe unauthorised departures by resisting the criminalisation, shame, and pathologisation often attached to migration, asserting instead the legitimacy and agency behind the decision to move. The third part focuses on how demands for justice and accountability are mobilised, as activists connect individual losses to broader structures of violence and state responsibility. Finally, the chapter analyses how activists resist the erasure of the missing, advocating for their families, preserving their memory, and demanding reparations and the freedom to move, thus challenging the politics of oblivion and dehumanisation that underpins border regimes.

Beyond Counting the Deaths: It's Time to Talk About Them



Figure 3. Caravan's flyer. Photo by the author.

From October 17 to 27, 2023, Boza Fii gathered in various towns across Senegal, Mbour, Thiès, Gandiol, and St. Louis to remember those who died at sea and at land borders and demand justice for these deaths. The Caravan group consisted of ten people, all Senegalese, eight men and three women, and myself. In each town visited, the Caravan event unfolded in three key stages. First, activists engaged in workshops with local organisations where they discussed border externalisation policies and possible actions civil society should take. Next, they visited the families of the missing, either in public spaces or in their homes, to offer condolences, express solidarity, and raise awareness of both their rights and those of their missing loved ones. Finally, evening rallies were held in public spaces such as squares or school courtyards, featuring video screenings that exposed the brutal realities of border regimes. These screenings were followed by discussions that raised awareness on border violence and the complicity of the Senegalese state, as well as the sharing of personal stories around border violence and death by both the activists and the public.

Led by returning migrants and human rights activists, Boza Fii was founded by Saliou Diouf in 2020, when he came back to Senegal after spending some years at the Moroccan-Spanish borderlands with fourteen unsuccessful attempts to cross the border. I first met Saliou on the day of Korité, the name given to Eid al-Fitr in West Africa, marking the end of Ramadan. Saliou's house, which also serves as Boza Fii's office, is located in the outskirts of Dakar. As we prepare Moroccan couscous, a tribute to the years he spent in Morocco, Saliou tells me about Boza Fii's work and asks me more about my research. He tells me that, if I want to understand migration and border externalisation, I am in the right place, as, according to him, one must "go to the source, and not only work at physical borders." Before I even have the chance to ask, he starts explaining what he means by it:

"You know, people do not realise this because we do not see any borders with Europe like in Morocco, but, really borders are here. When you are at Dakar's airport, for example, here in my own country, and you see Spanish police questioning you about where you're going, then you understand that something is very wrong."

Saliou is recalling a particular event in 2020, when European police officers were deployed at Dakar's airport under what was officially described as a "joint operational program" between Senegal and the European Union (Statewatch, 2020):

"In Munich, you will never see a Senegalese police officer stopping a German to ask for their papers, and you will never see a Senegalese gendarme in Paris stopping a white person to check their documents. Yet here, in Senegal, Spanish police officers are everywhere stopping and persecuting us at land and at sea."

For Saliou, these kinds of episodes expose the imbalance of power in border control, revealing the deep inequalities and uneven power relations that shape the management of mobility. "We are prisoners in our own country," he says with a sarcastic smile. As the chicken and lamb simmer on the stove, he laments that in recent years, "everything in Senegal has become about *migrations clandestines vers l'Europe*, so much so that even organisations that never worked on migration have rebranded themselves just to attract European funding to seal borders." He seems to disagree with this approach and emphasises that Boza Fii's mission is fundamentally political. The organisation's name, he explains, already embodies Boza Fii's broader political ideology on borders and mobility. The name *boza* comes from a term

with Cameroonian roots used by people on the move who reach Europe and shout in celebration, “Boza! Boza!”, when they make it. For Saliou, *boza* represents a “cry for freedom”, whereas the word *fii* is a Wolof term that means “here.” Boza Fii’s mission, as Saliou explains, is advocating for both the right to freedom of movement and settlement for all (hence, the right to Boza), as well as the right to succeed at home (Fii, in Senegal). Boza Fii’s motto is “Free to go, free to stay,” he explains, as they neither encourage people to leave, something he clarifies is a common misconception about his organisation, nor prevent people from going. “After all,” he says, “we too have been migrants, and we cannot hold people back with the false promise of getting a visa.”

Boza Fii is also closely linked to Alarm Phone-Watch the Med, a transnational activist network who provides emergency support to migrants in distress at sea along Europe’s external borders. According to Saliou, his broader activism and the creation of *Boza Fii* were sparked by his encounter with Alarm Phone while he was living in Morocco. He describes himself as a lifelong *militant*, a spirit he jokingly attributes to his father, whom he calls a *battant*, a fighter. “Being a rebel is in my DNA,” he says. Even as a child, he was always among those leading school strikes, insisting to his mother that he had to join because, as he puts it, “if we don’t fight for our rights, no one else will.” While in Morocco, he was also involved in creating an association for Senegalese migrants, which he recalls proudly as further proof of his social engagement. However, it was only after encountering Alarm Phone activists in Morocco, and experiencing firsthand the violence of the EU border regime, that Saliou became fully aware of the fact that mobility is a fundamental right. “Before, I was just trying to escape, you know, like all Senegalese, but I had no idea about what my rights were as a migrant,” he says while reflecting on the moment he developed a sense of political consciousness regarding borders and mobility rights.

Upon returning to Senegal, Saliou founded Boza Fii, driven by the realisation that much of the Senegalese population remained unaware of border violence and thus vulnerable to state narratives that criminalised migration and portrayed border deaths as unfortunate accidents rather than the outcome of systemic injustices embedded in border policies. Since its creation, Boza Fii’s popularity has grown significantly, and Saliou has become a recognised activist figure both locally and internationally. He is often invited to speak at activist events in Senegal and abroad, as well as in institutional settings such as the EU, frequently through left-leaning political networks. As with the “professional returnees” in Chapter VI and the mothers in Chapter VII, Boza Fii’s has also leveraged social and financial capital, although, unlike the

women's collectives and returnees's associations, much of this support comes from donors whose agendas align with Boza Fii's critical stance on border policies. This has enabled the organisation not only to expand its reach but also to strengthen its activities, receiving funding from transnational networks of no-border activists and organisations aligned with their radical message. The Caravan, Boza Fii's longest and far-reaching initiative, allows Saliou, along with fellow activists and friends, to engage directly with the communities most affected by unauthorised departures to Europe.

Rethinking Awareness-Raising Campaigns



Figure 4. Caravan's van preparation. Photo by the author.

“The idea of the Caravan is to make people understand that borders kill and to raise awareness about migration policies in Senegal,” Saliou explains as we prepare the van to begin the first stage of our journey. He says creating places where people can speak out is very important in Senegal because these spaces are getting smaller, as unauthorised migration to Europe, often labelled

migration clandestine, is strongly criminalised and stigmatised, creating a climate of silence. “When it comes to talking about migration,” he says, “people don’t dare to speak openly. Even the media is very restricted because, under pressure from the state, many fear that raising their voices might lead to their platform being shut down. So they simply avoid the topic.” As he explains how Boza Fii tries to counter this silence, Saliou returns to a term he often uses: *campagne de sensibilisation*, awareness-raising campaign. The term *sensibilisation* is used in Senegal by NGOs to talk about anything from malaria vaccines to sustainable farming, but in recent years it has been increasingly associated with migration. Coming from someone who identifies as an activist for freedom of movement, its use sounds strange to my ears. When I express my confusion, Saliou laughs: “You are right, in Senegal, when we talk about *campagne de sensibilisation* it usually means telling people to stay in their country, that’s the common understanding of it!” He explains that when working with local communities, it’s important to use the language people are familiar with, even if the meaning needs to be reshaped. “The word *sensibilisation* doesn’t even exist in Wolof,” he adds. “We use the French term so people know we’ve come to talk to them about migration.” For Saliou, the difference in the use of the term as opposed to traditional awareness-raising campaigns about migration lies in intention. “In our case,” he says, “*sensibilisation* means raising awareness for the fight for freedom of movement. We want Senegalese people to understand what is really happening, so they can demand change from our government.”

While typical awareness-raising campaigns depoliticise, criminalise, and pathologise unauthorised mobility by dissuading individuals from taking dangerous routes and blaming them for doing so, while ignoring the structural inequalities that restrict legal pathways, the Caravan’s narrative subverts these logics by framing the dangers of migration as the direct consequence of violent border policies. In this context, this form of awareness-raising that happens through the politicisation of mobility serves two key objectives: first, to educate fellow Senegalese about border externalisation policies, cultivating collective political consciousness about the violence and injustices they perpetuate by placing responsibility where it belongs; and second, to empower individuals to understand their rights while offering support to the families of missing migrants by providing crucial information on how to search for loved ones. In this sense, the Caravan functions as a form of counter-externalisation (Cuttitta 2022), actively resisting border policies by revealing their lethal consequences and the systemic injustices they uphold. For Saliou, raising awareness is the first crucial step in politicising the Senegalese population, so

they can join Boza Fii in their fight for freedom of movement and greater respect for the rights of those attempting the journey to Europe:

“People can only truly support us once they understand the meaning of our struggle, that’s why we organised this Caravan. It’s about telling families that they have the right to know what happened to their missing children, helping them understand that the responsibility lies with the state, and that we must hold it accountable. It’s also about talking about migration policies, telling people the truth about what’s happening in Senegal’s migration policies. What we are doing is politicising migration, not just raising awareness. We want people to understand why they can’t migrate, and why their children are dying at sea...”

Boza Fii activists see themselves as uniquely positioned to lead this struggle and raise awareness among fellow Senegalese citizens because they speak from embodied experience. “What we’ve witnessed at the borders is a far cry from the narrative our leaders share with the population,” Saliou often says at rallies and during encounters with bereaved families, underscoring the dissonance between lived realities and the official discourse. While state narratives frame border deaths as isolated tragedies, Boza Fii insists on their political nature as the outcome of deliberate choices. Reframing the narrative is crucial in their effort. Saliou often laments that many remain unaware of the violence of border regimes not only because this knowledge is actively suppressed, but also because when it is shared, it is done in ways that alienate ordinary people:

“There is no communication, everything happens behind closed doors. Governments, organisations, researchers, journalists, they all have their way of talking about it, but it doesn’t reach the people. In contrast, we use even the simplest examples to explain what is going on. At some point, when the government is faced with people who understand well what is going on, who have good communication, who have good information, then they will be forced to make changes.”

According to Saliou, the most effective approach to catch people’s interest is to spark curiosity by appealing to familiar experiences. During the Caravan, activists often use simple language and point to examples like the presence of European police at Dakar’s airport, the impossibility of getting a Schengen visa or the deployment of the Guardia Civil along Senegalese coasts, things that most Senegalese people have experienced firsthand, seen or heard:

“Externalisation is when a person leaves their country and goes to another, demanding that the laws of their home country be applied there. It is like saying: ‘I don’t want to deal with migrants at sea or on my land during border controls. Instead, I’ll make sure to keep them in their own countries and discourage them from leaving. Even here, we sometimes see the Guardia Civil stroll on the beach. This is what we call externalisation, they do not wait for us in Europe, but they come to our land to control us, to chase us!’”

Other relatable examples shared during the rallies and community discussions emphasise the artificial nature of borders, aiming to challenge the very foundational logic of border regimes, which treat borders as fixed, material realities that divide sovereign states, granting them the right to arbitrarily determine who can enter and under what conditions. A common reference point used by activists is the colonial redrawing of borders in Africa. During a rally, one activist passionately declared that the border “is a system put in place by Europeans,” as he claims that, in reality, “borders do not exist,” leveraging the example of Senegalese and Gambians, who, he says, “speak the same language, yet are separated by a border.”

Activists also use this narrative to highlight how European anxieties surrounding black mobility have also restricted movement within Africa itself. Such notions resonate deeply with most participants of the Caravan, who widely share their own experiences of border crossing especially in Gambia and Mauritania. By highlighting the shifting borders in areas that were once more porous, Boza Fii encourages reflection on the broader trend of border externalisation and the increasing control over movement, which have reshaped regional geographies based on Eurocentric priorities, as one activist puts it:

“The pretext under which European police were legitimised to operate in African countries was based on a crisis in Spain in 2006, known as the ‘crisis de los cayucos’. Faced with the tightening of visa opportunities in the Schengen area and the difficulties of traveling by air, a few thousand West Africans began organising informal travel routes. Europe, and particularly Spain, perceived this as an invasion that needed to be stopped.”

This account recontextualises the European narrative surrounding the 2006 “migration crisis” to the Canary Islands by challenging its hegemonic framing. For Senegalese, this moment is not seen as “a massive invasion of illegal

immigrants,” as European discourses suggest (Carrera 2007), but rather as the point when Europe’s anxieties began shaping everyday lives across Africa according to its own priorities.

As such, the Caravan emerges as a unique form of awareness-raising campaign that reclaims a term and practice commonly used within the apparatus of border externalisation and radically reorients it toward politicisation. Rather than discouraging movement, it mobilises *sensibilisation* as a political tool to expose border violence and cultivate collective consciousness. In doing so, it exemplifies mobility practice as political, not simply as movement across space, but as an embodied and relational form of struggle that openly confronts and subverts dominant border regimes by speaking truth to power.

Fighting Criminalisation, Pathologisation and Shame

During the warm early afternoons of the Caravan, when the heat of late autumn in Senegal gives way to a breeze that announces the arrival of cooler air, I sit among Boza Fii activists and those who join spontaneously for lunch, tea, and conversation, sometimes members of local partner organisations, other times passersby drawn in by the food or the company. One day, the discussion focuses on the difficulty of speaking openly to people about unauthorised departures in the midst of misinformation spread by the Senegalese state and the EU. “Look at me,” Saliou says as we relax beneath the trees in the square in Thies. We have already set up the chairs and banners for the video screening later in the evening, so we are just taking it slow and chatting, waiting for the warmest hours of the day to pass. “I am not a *clandestine*,” he says, “I’m a migrant, a human being. But why am I called clandestine?” he asks, his tone clearly questioning. Upon his return to Senegal after many years in Morocco, he was shocked to hear the term clandestine being normalised and used everywhere, on Senegalese broadcasts, in the streets, and even by his own family. As a migrant himself, and having spent years challenging this very narrative through his activism in Morocco, it was especially painful to hear it echoed in his own country. It felt as though his own experiences, struggles, and the realities he lived at the border were covered by shame, suspicion and mistrust:

“I am not a *clandestine*, and I want to tell everyone there is no such thing. Migration is just migration. There are people who can’t get plane tickets, who can’t get a visa, but they can travel by sea; they’re fishermen, they know the way. There are also people who aren’t

fishermen, they don't have a visa, they can't travel by plane, but they have friends who are fishermen or people they can pay to take them. That's the logic. It's as simple as that. It's like birds flying from country to country. So, we need to respect everyone for how they are allowed to move. This is how I think about it and what I want people to understand."

Saliou's words echo a broader struggle over meaning, legitimacy, and dignity in mobility. His voice, grounded in the everyday realities of coastal Senegal, offers a sharp rebuttal to the criminalising language that travels with border externalisation, permeating not only policy but also popular discourse. The fact that he insists on redefining migration on his own terms illustrates how deeply European migration narratives have taken root even in places physically distant from EU borders. In Saliou's framing, taking a boat to reach Europe is not an act of deviance but a rational, grounded, and often necessary response to systemic exclusion. Against the dominant narrative that blames those who perish at sea for their supposed irresponsibility, Saliou offers a counternarrative: "Those who die, they carry only one responsibility, that of standing before death and choosing to defy it!" Yet, as he points out, the conversation in Senegal is often foreclosed before it begins:

"It is the very terminology used that carries already a certain negative connotation, with stereotypes attached: *migration clandestine*, *migration irrégulière*... These terms all place the blame on the migrants, so these young people are no longer seen as victims and when they die in the desert or at sea, society perceives them as criminals, individuals who want to die, who lack ambition, who are uninterested in life, and who are somehow unintelligent."

This internalised criminalisation, Saliou insists, does not only circulate in the media, it infiltrates families and communities, distorting how grief and loss are processed. During the Caravan Boza Fii, activists work to unsettle these inherited meanings by talking directly to the families:

"When they tell you that your children are clandestine or irregular, it is because it suits the state's agenda, but they are not criminals! Families need to understand that the young people who take the pirogues are not criminals, it is their right to move, and the pirogue is often the only option available to them."

This logic of criminalisation, Saliou emphasises, seeps deep into the fabric of society and is reinforced not only through policy but also through a broader pathologisation of mobility. In Senegal, as activists recount, this dynamic is further entrenched by a widespread narrative propagated by Senegalese authorities that “makes parents believe their sons committed suicide.” This framing does more than absolve the state of responsibility, it downplays the meaning of loss, transforming grief into guilt and mourning into silence as it pushes families toward shame. This is captured in the words of a father whose son went missing at sea, as he speaks during a visit with the families:

“They [the government] dare to say my son committed suicide. It’s not suicide! Going to find something to support your family is not suicide. You lose your son, and as if that is not enough, they dare to tell you he went to commit suicide.”

Invoking suicide plays a central role in the pathologisation of unauthorised departures. Those who go missing or die at sea are not only criminalised but also blamed for their own deaths, portrayed as irrational, deviant, or mentally unstable. In a religious society where suicide is considered one of the gravest sins in Islam, this association carries immense social and spiritual weight, denying families the possibility of mourning with dignity. Their children are not only lost, they are condemned. A stark illustration of this logic can be found in a 2020 public statement by Serigne Bass Abdou Khadre, the spokesperson for the Khalif General of the Mourides, Senegal’s most influential and politically powerful Sufi brotherhood. During a public speech, he declared that clandestine migration is “synonymous with suicide” and warned that “those who die at sea will go to hell,” likening unauthorised migration to a willful self-destruction (Ndiaye 2020). His words echoed through mosques, media, and communities, were not an isolated incident but part of a broader instrumentalisation of religion in the service of migration deterrence. EU-funded awareness campaigns have for years enlisted imams to denounce so-called clandestine migration as *haram*, using theological authority to frame it as a suicidal act and, therefore, a sin of the highest order (Guwye, Fall, & Tall 2007). By leveraging the moral authority of spiritual leaders, this strategy cloaks the criminalisation of mobility in religious legitimacy, portraying unauthorised migrants as both spiritually deviant and socially threatening. As a result, people who die in the attempt to cross are rendered not only illegal but ungrievable. The stigma around suicide is so powerful that it even fosters division within the communities themselves, often leading to the social isolation of the families of the missing. For example, during the Caravan, many

people shared how, when their sons and daughters left on a pirogue, neighbours and friends looked down on them and showed no sympathy.



Figure 5. Afternoon visit to the families of the missing in Gandiol. Photo by the author.

Because narratives of criminalisation and pathologisation are so pervasive, and because shame often attaches itself not only to those who migrate but also to their families, Boza Fii activists confront these logics head-on during the Caravan. Through open discussions, storytelling, and humor, they work to challenge these narratives and restore the personhood of those who decide to leave. “These young people are not criminals or suicidal,” Saliou explains to the families gathered beneath the shade of a tree. “They are ambitious and resourceful. Look at these people,” he adds, gesturing toward Boza Fii members seated among the audience, “their decision to leave was part of a long-term plan.” The he continues:

“Just think about the effort it takes, to gather money, negotiate with the pirogue captain, navigate entire networks just to make the journey possible. That’s not desperation, that’s determination. It’s not suicide.

Most of these young people applied for visas first, only to be rejected. The system left them no other option.”

In Saliou’s words, the meticulous planning and resilience that go into taking the pirogue emerge as a celebration of strategic action, countering dominant portrayals of irregular migration as reckless or irrational. In particular, the notion that people leave to commit suicide is not only dismissed as false, but openly ridiculed. Stepping in after Saliou, another activist declares:

“We’ve come to tell you that your child did not commit suicide. Think about it: who pays 500,000 CFA to kill themselves? If someone wanted to die, they could hang themselves, they could jump into the river. Suicide is free! No one goes around saying, ‘Here’s some money, now go and kill yourself.’”

Laughter ripples through the crowd, but the message is clear: those who died at sea are not shameful, nor mad, they are courageous. “They are heroes to their families,” the activist continues, “they left because they believed in something better.” Here, laughter becomes a tool of resistance (Karlsson-Franck 2022), where humour can be politically subversive by disarming dominant narratives and exposing their absurdity.

This narrative reframing is essential, especially because many families struggle to understand or speak about unauthorised departures. The societal pressure to “make it” abroad, combined with the religious and social stigma surrounding unauthorised migration, creates an atmosphere of silence and taboo. Many who leave do not tell their families the conditions of the journey, or avoid contacting them altogether. This silence not only obstructs empathy, but also reinforces narratives of deviance, further entrenching the logic of criminalisation among families themselves. To counter this, Boza Fii activists reappropriate storytelling, long used in EU-funded awareness campaigns to discourage migration, not as a deterrent, but as a practice of re-humanisation. Drawing on their own embodied experiences, they speak of hunger in the desert, beatings at the hands of border guards, the psychological strain of being unable to reach Europe, and the crushing burden of family expectations. Their stories are not meant to instil fear, but understanding. They shift the lens from failure to resilience, from stigma to struggle, and from shame to survival, legitimising stories of unauthorised departures as acts of agency and resistance against an unjust mobility regime. “We need to change how we talk about migration in Senegal, among us,” Saliou explains, “so that those who are

struggling can receive support and encouragement rather than judgment. That is what we do. It's important to try to understand people, because if you don't, you end up humiliating them."

While the content of the stories shared during the Caravan may resemble those shared in EU-funded awareness campaigns aimed at discouraging migration, the key difference lies in how Boza Fii uses these stories to deliver a political message. Their goal is not to deter mobility, but to challenge families and society to reconsider their prejudices toward migration. This act of telling stories is political, as it not only rehumanises migrants in the eyes of their families and the broader population but also leverages personal experience as a political claim against border violence.

Seeking Justice for Forced Deaths: Who is to Blame?

All eyes remain fixed on the screen as footage unfolds of black bodies brutalised by Moroccan and Spanish police at the Spanish enclave of Melilla, followed by scenes of the Libyan so-called Coast Guard firing on a boat full of people between Italy and Libya. In the front row, children occasionally laugh or play until adults hush them into silence. Though these videos do not show the more concealed and indirect violence of the Senegalese borderlands, they starkly expose the deadly consequences of border externalisation. By revealing how, for over a decade, the European Union, often in collaboration with African governments, has enforced migration control on African soil, they inform the local population of a system designed to stop black people from reaching Europe, frequently at the cost of their lives. While geographically distant, these border regimes strike a familiar chord with the audience, many of whom have taken, or know someone who has taken, the same routes through North Africa or Libya in search of a better life in Europe.

After the screening, a Boza Fii activist steps forward to address the crowd. He explains that the purpose of these videos is "to reveal what happens at the borders, scenes too often hidden from view." His words are direct, describing these acts as "organised crimes," "forced deaths" and "forced disappearances," insisting that there are clear perpetrators who must be held accountable. Such deaths, Saliou explains, are intentional as people "are forced to leave the country through risky journeys because of government agreements and visa

denials,” only to then be “directly killed at sea or at the border, disappear or left to die by both Europe and Senegal.”



Figure 6. Evening video-projection in Thies. Photo courtesy by Boza Fii.

Within the context of the Caravan, the concept of “forced deaths” is central and it encompasses deaths that occur at any “functionally defined border sites” (Heller and Pecoud 2018:5), including both direct violence, such as the killings at Melilla or attacks by the Libyan Coast Guard, and indirect forms, like drownings at sea, deaths in deserts or in detention centres. Framing border deaths as forced deaths is a political act: it exposes that these deaths happen because of the border and are produced by specific policies and actors who bear responsibility. For Boza Fii, this framing is essential to understanding borders as sites where death is an intentional feature of border externalisation, occurring along the entire im/mobility continuum. It also shifts focus beyond Europe alone, highlighting the complicity of African states which, despite differing power dynamics, co-produce the lethal conditions that render black mobility deadly. Crucially, the act of demanding accountability also constitutes a form of mobility practice as political action, a way of reclaiming movement through speaking, organising, and exposing what border regimes attempt to hide. Through this framing, the Caravan holds the Senegalese state politically accountable in three key ways: undermining the right to remain at home under good conditions, undermining the right to leave safely by failing to negotiate fairer visa policies, and actively participating in border externalisation efforts. Activists argue that, while the Senegalese government has long deflected responsibility by placing blame solely on the EU, it is now

imperative for the state to acknowledge its role and take responsibility for its actions.

Undermining the “Right to Stay Home”

During the Caravan, stories of forced death are told not as isolated tragedies, but as the cumulative outcome of systemic state failures that have deeply eroded the “right to stay home.” This right refers to an individual’s right to make personal decisions about where to live without being restricted by various forms of insecurities. Yet, the activists are careful to reject a narrative that misuses the right to stay as a political tool to promote sedentarism as a moral and economic imperative. This instrumentalisation happens when the “right to stay” is deployed strategically in migration management policies to frame migration as a problem that must be prevented by encouraging people to “stay put.” In this version of the so-called “root causes” approach, the right to stay is used less as a genuine human right and more as a way to delegitimise or restrict the freedom to move, often to justify policies that aim to control or limit migration rather than addressing the structural inequalities that compel people to leave.

This tension is vividly apparent in the critique that Caravan participants level against both national institutions and international donors. “When Europeans arrive with a small suitcase of money,” one of the activists claims with frustration, “our leaders agree to sign deals to try to convince people to stay by training them for three months, telling them they will find a job afterwards!” The activists name specific Senegalese agencies, such as the Directorate General of Support for Senegalese Abroad and the Reception, Orientation, and Follow-up Office (BAOS), as central actors in promoting a narrow version of the right to stay, often in partnership with European development bodies such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the French Development Agency (AFD), the French Office for Immigration and Integration (OFII), the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).

Programs like “Tekki Fii” (Make it Here), generously funded, among others, through the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF), which allocated nearly €164 million to employment projects in Senegal (Altai, 2023), embody this logic. These initiatives project an image of prosperity at home as a viable alternative to migration, yet offer little beyond short-term training and minimal financial support. As one activist shinningly put it:

“The European Union tells us to stay here and succeed here. But succeed *how*? They give money to our government, and then the government calls some organisations and assigns them the task of telling the youth to stay here with no work and no future. This is impossible, let’s be honest!”

These programs reduce complex aspirations and struggles to a cost-benefit calculation, as if a few hundred euros and a business workshop could erase the systemic violence of forced immobility. “Money cannot stop migration,” one of the activists claims bitterly, “look here in Senegal, how many millions of euros have been spent on migration-related structures. But that hasn’t stopped people from leaving, has it? People leave and continue leaving [...] money does not fix everything.”

In this sense, the “right to stay” invoked by Boza Fii is very far from the narrative of “Tekki Fii” programs, and it can only be realised through a genuine opportunity for choice, which must include the guarantee of freedom of movement and the tangible, realistic possibility of “making it” in Senegal. This, according to Saliou, is a far cry for ordinary Senegalese citizens:

“Years ago, we were told we would live better than our parents, but that is far from the truth. Most people in Senegal, no matter their ambition, will not escape the exploitation of capitalist systems, where finding a job is a battle. They demand three to five years of experience just to endure a job with no career plan. Add miserable salaries, no social benefits, grueling hours, and a sky-high cost of living in Senegal. What have our diplomas given us, if we’re still begging for survival, even while working! People don’t work just to eat; they work to secure their children’s future, improve their family’s social life, and create a better tomorrow. But that’s impossible here. Senegal is one of the richest countries in natural resources, yet one of the poorest in the world. How can we explain this?”

Saliou’s words crystallise a broader sentiment: that the right to stay has been rendered hollow in a context where living a dignified life is out of reach for most. Activists tie this erosion of choice to the long arc of neoliberal exploitation after independence. Structural adjustment policies, the devaluation of the CFA franc, and World Bank/IMF-backed development models have pushed people into informal economies and deepened inequality (Mbodji, 2008). These conditions, they argue, leave people little option but to risk their lives at sea. In the activists’ narrative, the Senegalese state is not a

victim of external pressure, but is actively complicit in this process. In public forums, activists condemn what they see as a betrayal by their own government: “You are born here, you study here, you work hard here, and yet your country gives you nothing,” Saliou claims, his voice heavy with frustration. “Boza Fii will never tell people to accept this life of getting by.”

During discussions between Boza Fii activists, local organisations, and community members, a recurring theme was Senegal’s culture of “getting by,” a term that encapsulates the everyday survival strategies people must employ to navigate structural abandonment. This ethos reflects what Mendy (1992:3) has called the “Senegalese doctrine of Goorgoorlouism,” rooted in the Wolof verb *goorgoorlu*, often translated in French as *je m’en sors* or *je me débrouille*, meaning “doing one’s best,” “making do” or “getting by” (Seck 2018). It is both a cultural ideal and a political condition: the figure of the *goorgoorlu* becomes the Senegalese *homo economicus*, the resilient individual who hustles, adapts, and survives in a context of scarcity (Diop 2008:20). This logic underpins *Tekki Fii* programs and other similar initiatives that promote “the right to stay,” which frame economic hardship and endurance as signs of responsible citizenship and development-mindedness (Seneplus 2024). The activists reject this logic, claiming that this glorification of self-reliance has become a smokescreen for structural neglect. In this context, when Saliou says that Boza Fii will never tell people to accept a life of “getting by,” he is directly challenging the neoliberal narrative of resilience, adaptability, and self-sufficiency that underpins mainstream understandings of the right to stay. In the activists’ narrative, people want more than just survival, they want dignity, mobility, and a future.

At the core of the state’s failure to uphold the right to stay, activists point to poor governance, endemic youth unemployment, and entrenched social inequalities, failures they largely attribute to decades of corrupt leadership that, in their narrative, “sell the country to foreign powers.” These failures are not seen as isolated or recent but as part of a longer historical trajectory shaped by colonialism, capitalist expansion, and neocolonial domination. They draw attention to concrete examples of neoliberal capitalist extraction that, as they argue, have systematically underdeveloped Africa while enriching Europe (c.f. Rodney 1972). Throughout the Caravan, Boza Fii activists repeatedly expose the contradictions of a global system that brands African nations as “poor” while continuously extracting their wealth: “It is illogical to call Africans poor when they [Europeans] constantly come to us to extract our resources!” Others echo this paradox, pointing out that Africans are considered poor despite

“having everything, land, people, resources,” while Europe is considered rich despite “having nothing.” For them, this glaring contradiction embodies the failure of the Senegal state complicit in a global system of plunder that they see as a continuation of colonial-era power dynamics. During discussions with local communities and workshops with civil society organisations, the concrete realities of extractivism and resource plundering emerge as a recurring and emotionally charged theme. Both the activists and the participants frequently cite the sale of exclusive fishing zones to foreign fleets, that lead to overfishing, damage marine ecosystems, and create unequal competition, undermining traditional fishers’ ability to sustain their livelihoods (Uwazuruike, 2023), and the systematic exploitation of Senegal’s oil, gas, and mineral wealth, as stark examples of how local livelihoods are sacrificed for the profit of foreign powers (c.f. Gerth-Niculescu and Simoncelli, 2024) and Senegalese elites (c.f. BBC, 2019). During one particular discussion where unequal fishing agreements were debated, the conversation took a fiery turn as a young man from the crowd stood up and declared: “The European Union must return to Africa its freedom and its independence to choose!” Another followed: “The agreements between the European Union and Africa must be negotiated on equal terms, not as master-and-slave agreements!” These statements sparked an animated exchange about the enduring asymmetries between the two continents and their effects on undermining the right to stay. An elderly man then asked for the microphone:

“Let me tell you, if a young person comes to me and says they want to leave, I would tell them: go ahead! I would say that because I know the difference between the two continents... There are European states that live off our blood, who suck our blood...”

His words drew laughter and agreement from the crowd, followed by another voice: “They are vampires... They suck our blood, and in return, we can’t do the same with them!”

This exchange was just one of many that linked unauthorised mobility with neocolonial relations rooted in structural adjustment and extractivism. While European responsibility was frequently invoked as a vague and distant actor, the activists’ and the public’s sharpest critique targeted the Senegalese government, seen as failing to defend its citizens’ right to a dignified life, and thereby actively undermining their right to stay.

Undermining the “Right to Leave Safely”

During one of the evening video-screenings, one of the videos featured the *Cimetière des Inconnus* in Zarzis, Tunisia, created by a former Tunisian fisherman, Chamseddine Marzoug, who dedicates himself to providing dignified burials for people who drowned during their journey to Europe and whose bodies are washed ashore. At the end of the video, a journalist asks Marzoug what his feelings around these unidentified dead bodies are. Chamseddine Marzoug replies that he feels anger towards Europe. Here, one of Boza Fii members pauses the video, looks at the crowd and asks: “Why is Chamseddine angry with Europe?” Quite a few people stare at the screen and mumble something, yet no one replies. Saliou grabs the microphone, repeating the question to emphasize its weight, before he pauses and begins to explain:

“The answer is simple, he is angry at Europe because those who take the pirogues have no choice. They would have preferred to board a plane, dress well, wait in a lounge, fly to Europe and land peacefully. But instead of flying they are left with no choice but to cross the sea or travel over land. These are the only three options: either you fly, you cross by sea, or you take the road and risk dying in the desert. Those are the only options”.

As he speaks, his tone rises, becoming more intense and gravely serious. More people, mostly workers returning from their day or street vendors whose stalls are nearby, are drawn in by his voice, slowly gathering around to listen as Saliou continues: “Chamseddine is angry with Europeans because of the scam that exists in Africa. Anyone who has applied for a visa knows exactly what I mean.” Many in the crowd begin to nod in agreement, exchanging knowing glances and subtle gestures of approval. Saliou continues, elaborating on the hurdles and humiliation people face when applying for a visa, as seen in Chapter IV. During Caravan rallies, frustration with this reality is palpable, as many among the participants question the stark inequalities of a system where white people move freely, while black mobility is relentlessly surveilled and racialised. Boza Fii activists name the European Union as the main architect of this inequality, reflected in the restrictive Schengen visa list:

“White people cannot insist on safe and legal migration, while simultaneously closing the embassies and making visa conditions even stricter. Here everyone who takes a pirogue pays at least 500,000 francs. Those who cross the desert pay double, even triple that amount. With that money, you could apply for and obtain a visa, take a flight, maybe

even pay for a hotel for a night or two upon arrival! So why isn't it possible to get a visa?"

Yet, their critique lands most sharply on the Senegalese government, whose corruption and incompetence, they insist, directly block people from exercising their "right to leave" safely. The activists argue that by failing to negotiate fair and reciprocal mobility agreements, and by allowing opaque and discriminatory visa practices to persist unchallenged, the Senegalese state effectively collaborates in a system that denies its own citizens the freedom of movement: "The Senegalese state is so weak that it signs agreements to allow European embassies to be closed to black people, and in the end, it is us, the people, who suffer, especially the poor."

In their narrative, this failure is not merely administrative but political, reflecting a broader allegiance to foreign interests and elite privilege at the expense of ordinary Senegalese citizens: "The way the European Union ensures the safety of its citizens when they travel, whether by land, sea, or air, is remarkable. Why can't our state allow us to do the same?" This sentiment is echoed by many in the crowd, who point out that, while the EU has secured freedom of movement for its own citizens, the Senegalese state appears to prioritise access to visas for well-connected families and friends.

Complicity with Border Externalisation Policies



Figure 7. Evening video-projection in Gandiol. The screen is showing the Libyan Coast Guard ramming a boat. Photo courtesy by Boza Fii.

The third, and perhaps most direct way in which, according to the activists' narrative, the Senegalese state contributes to forced deaths is through its complicity in the EU's "hard" border externalisation policies. This complicity takes shape in concrete practices: allowing European border forces to operate within Senegalese territory, equipping local security services to block departures, and participating in joint efforts aimed at preventing unauthorised exits. During the late-night screenings, the activists bring this reality to life with powerful visual testimonies. One of the most striking videos shows scenes from the 2022 Melilla massacre, where black bodies piled and motionless are surrounded by armed Moroccan and Spanish officers (ECRE 2022). "What you just saw," one of the activists says while explaining the video, "is the result of Spain giving Morocco a lot of money to stop migrants from reaching Europe." He gestures toward the frozen image on the screen, urging people to take in the scene: "If it were Europeans trying to cross borders, they would be welcomed. But when it's Senegalese, Cameroonians, Nigerians, we are met with tear gas and we are killed, as you can see." The mood grows heavy. Murmurs ripple through the crowd. Then the activist adds:

"And why is this happening? Because our own leaders allow it! Our own governments are complicit. That's what this video shows you. That's why we say the enemy of Africans is often other Africans. The responsibility lies with our authorities, because they are the ones who sign these deals, who choose to serve European interests instead of protecting their own people."

While the video depicting the massacre at the Spanish-Moroccan border fades away, a second video shows the so-called Libyan Coast Guard opening fire on migrants in distress at sea. "We are showing you this video to talk about how border externalisation kills people at sea," Saliou says addressing the crowd. He points to the frozen image on the screen, where a coast guard boat is seen ramming a vessel full of people. "This is what happens at sea," he adds before turning to the crowd and asking "And who is responsible for these crimes? Our own leaders! [...] Europeans provide the money, and Africans carry out the killings without consequences."

The video showing the violence of the so-called Libyan Coast Guard, funded and equipped by the EU, opens up a discussion about the role of Frontex. Drawing on a 2021 Report by Human Rights Watch and Border Forensics (HRW 2021), the activists accuse the agency of being complicit with Libyan authorities, explaining how its aerial drones do not alert rescue vessels to help migrants in distress, but instead allow the Libyan Coast Guard to intercept and

return them to Libya, where they face further abuse. Recalling this episode allows Boza Fii activists to draw a parallel with the potential risks posed by Frontex's deployment in Senegal, as negotiations for its presence were underway in the country at the time of the Caravan. "Frontex stands for *frontières à l'extérieur*" Saliou explains to the audience after showing the video, "this means that the European Union has created a *criminal* network that, instead of waiting for young people to reach Europe, goes to Africa to stop them from even leaving." With the same accusatory tone, he argues that Frontex's boats resemble warships more than rescue vessels, and their crews look more like soldiers than humanitarians: "Rather than carrying life vests, they carry weapons at sea. And there they are, chasing our young people! Instead of waiting for us to come to Europe to expel us, they come to our countries."

Activists further portray the agency in dramatic terms as a "murderous institution" that "kills people instead of saving them," deploying this framing strategically to galvanize public opposition to its presence and operations in Senegal. Beyond vocally opposing it through public speeches and videos, Boza Fii members convey this message through slogans and clothing. During the Caravan, in each of the towns visited they wear and distribute t-shirts saying "*Gaal moo gën Frontex*" Wolof for "A pirogue is stronger than Frontex." Already during the first event, within minutes, all the boxes of blue and black anti-Frontex t-shirts have seemingly vanished, and women and men of all ages are proudly wearing them. They pose for photos, laughing, adjusting shirts, and showing them off to others who did not arrive on time. When I ask about what the slogan actually means, Saliou explains without hesitation: "Frontex kills more than the pirogues. It's Frontex that calls the police to kill migrants, whether at sea or in the desert. Frontex does the dirty job. That's why we say the *gaal* [pirogue] is better than Frontex."

For those present at the video projections, Frontex quickly becomes the quintessential symbol of border violence. As the discussion unfolds, people grow animated, gesturing, raising their voices, and weaving criticism of Frontex seemingly into their accounts, often as a shorthand for a vaguely specified set of authorities enforcing the border. During this lively discussion, both activists and members of the crowd share firsthand testimonies of violent actions by Senegalese police and navy forces against departing migrants, ranging from ramming migrant boats and firing on people at sea to arbitrary arrests, denouncing a broader pattern of state complicity in enforcing harsh border control measures. One of the episodes shared by one participant in

particular recalls an incident in Tengueth, a fishing village in Dakar, where the person described witnessing gendarmes shooting at a pirogue at sea. Another testimony from the crowd recounts another tragic episode that allegedly occurred in 2023 in Fass Boye, a fishing village in the North of Senegal, when a shipwreck claimed the lives of several people. During protests by local youth demanding the bodies of those who had died, tensions escalated. In retaliation, the police reportedly stormed the homes of the protestors at night, arresting and beating them. Others recount other episodes in which police forces allegedly used violent tactics to deter unauthorised departures, often resulting in injury and even death. One witness shared the story of a young man in Mbour who, after missing the chance to board a pirogue, witnessed the police shooting at the passengers on board, leading to a deadly confrontation that caused the boat to lose control and resulted in the loss of lives by drowning. Others recount similar incidents in Rufisque, a neighbourhood of Dakar, where police spotted a group preparing to depart for the Canary Islands and open fire to disperse them, allegedly leading to the death of one man.

Overall, the Caravan mobilises mobility itself as a political practice, disrupting the normalisation of border violence and demanding accountability for migrant deaths. While the attribution of responsibility is not always straightforward (activists often trace it to European actors or the Senegalese state interchangeably, and at times blur or homogenise the distinctions between Europe, Senegal, and institutions like Frontex or the Guardia Civil) they consistently frame forced departures and deaths as the outcome of political choices that erode the right to stay, perpetuate unjust visa regimes, enable the presence of European border agencies on Senegalese territory, and authorise violence against citizens seeking to move. The following sections explore how, once accountability is established, the Caravan's political message shifts toward confronting oblivion by advocating for the missing, supporting their families, and demanding reparations.

Fighting Oblivion: Advocating for the Missing and Their Families



Figure 8. One of the banners put up in every town saying one of the Caravan’s slogans: No Forgetting, No Forgiving/ Truth, Justice and Reparations. Photo by the author.

Saliou, three members of Boza Fii, and I walk through the dusty streets of Pikine in St. Louis, making our way to the home of one of the many families of the missing. Visits to the families in their own homes are a crucial part of the Caravan, not only to speak directly with those affected and hear their stories, but also as a moment of awareness-raising against the silence and public oblivion that follow a shipwreck. It is a lively morning in the neighbourhood, filled with the hum of conversation spilling from open doorways, the buzz of passing motorbikes, and the clatter of street-food vendors preparing their stalls for lunch. The neighbourhood chief joins us, guiding us through the narrow streets as he speaks of the most recent shipwreck that has left the community in mourning. “When someone dies at sea, even if

he is not my son or my brother, it affects us all,” he says solemnly. A few weeks earlier, a pirogue bound for Spain had caught fire at sea. Many young men from the neighbourhood had been on board. They all jumped in the water to escape the flames, he says, but none could swim. Only a few bodies were identified. A young man from the neighbourhood walks beside us. The chief gestures toward him, explaining that he was supposed to be on that very boat but changed his mind at the last moment. “*Alhamdulillah*” he murmurs, “had he stepped onto that boat, he would not be here today.” We make our way to the first family’s home. The neighbourhood chief steps forward to introduce us, performing the social rites of hospitality. We are led inside, where a modest living room welcomes us with a carpet spread across the floor and the noise of two fans to spare us from the heat. We sit cross-legged as Saliou extends our condolences. The mother of one of the young men who died in the shipwreck speaks. Her words are an entanglement of pain, anger, and exhaustion, grief for a son whose body was never searched for, identified, or buried; rage at the many organisations who have come with promises of help but have delivered nothing.

That afternoon, as we are sitting together after lunch, discussing the morning’s visits, Saliou and the other activists engage in an animated discussion. “The problem is that Senegalese people do not know their rights,” Saliou says. The conversation shifts into Wolof, a flurry of voices and gesturing hands that I cannot fully follow, as I catch only fragments of the frustration. Then, with a hint of irony, someone switches to French so I can understand: “Even when they do know their rights, they believe that they cannot do anything before the law, they think they cannot fight the government.” Another voice adds with the same ironic tone: “Yes, *the law*, but in the end, it’s still them, the government, who make the laws, for themselves, not for us!” Saliou turns to me, ensuring I am following along. “You see,” he says, “this is what I meant. This is how Senegalese people are. Families don’t know their rights, and that is the biggest problem. They believe that if you die at sea, that is the end. The government has succeeded in making us accept this way of thinking.”

When people die “like this,” Saliou says referring to shipwrecks, “families often believe that discussing their deaths is taboo and that these tragedies should remain hidden.” Through the Caravan, Boza Fii strives to break the taboo by conveying that the deaths of those embarking on an unauthorised journey deserve memory, dignity and respect. “We try to make people understand that those who are no longer in this world still represent something, because they had a family. Therefore, we must respect their rights,” he says.

This is achieved not only by changing the widespread narrative around criminalisation, pathologisation, and shame, as seen above, but also by raising awareness among families about their rights and the rights of the dead. This acknowledges that the effects of the colonial encounter are not limited to the individuals who move, but they also have a significant influence on families and communities, who have the right to know the fate of their loved ones. Dead bodies are also acknowledged as individuals that still retain rights and dignity. These efforts must be viewed in the broader framework of mobility as a political practice, where Boza Fii activists advocate not only for accountability for these deaths, but also for the restoration of dignity to the families and missing persons by acknowledging the three fundamental rights of knowledge, identification, and burial.

The Right to Know

“When a boat leaves, we don’t know if there was a shipwreck, we don’t know if people are alive or dead, in any case, we don’t even know where they are. There is no wreck found, there are no life jackets floating, there are no bodies washed up by the sea, and our children just disappear...Every year, countless Senegalese go missing, yet no one in society has taken responsibility for helping affected families find their children” says Saliou standing before some families of the victims:

“Some families have even held funerals for their sons without knowing if they are truly dead. That is an unbearable pain. If you must hold a funeral, at least you must do it knowing for certain that the person is really gone! This is why we demand that the state search for the missing.”

These words capture the most important aspect to fight oblivion for the families of the victims, that is the right for state-provided information about their missing loved ones. “Many families,” Saliou explains “are still waiting for answers, they want to know, they need to know, but they are often unaware that they have the right to demand this knowledge.” As the activists stress, when people disappear at sea or in the desert, no official record is kept, no bodies are recovered, and often no one even informs their families. Saliou understands this anguish all too well. He has lived it, carried it, and been affected by it as he recalls nights spent scanning faces at the border in Morocco, hoping to spot a friend who had vanished without a word. He recalls the numerous questions that hammered in his head: where had they gone? Have

they made it? Were they lost at sea, taken by the police, or stranded in an unfamiliar land? For him, uncertainty is what lingers the most as the silence leaves parents, siblings and friends trapped in a cycle of uncertainty and grief for years: “One day, someone is beside you, laughing, dreaming, planning for a future. The next, they are gone, leaving only silence in their place. No goodbyes, no final messages, just an absence that haunts those left behind.” Saliou describes how he has stood in that quiet searching and waiting for years. He recalls that, at the time, he also did not know he had the right to search for his missing friends:

“I also did not know, but I tell you now, authorities cannot look away, they have an obligation not only to prevent these tragedies but to search for the missing, to account for the dead, to give families the answers they deserve.”

Due to the general taboo surrounding the topic, many families are hesitant even to ask for answers, as Saliou explains:

“The families here in Senegal, live with this quest for unanswered questions. They live with this pain without having the courage to express it, without being able to have the courage to share it, not even with their loved ones.”

Approaching authorities is also not an option. Due to Senegal’s widespread criminalisation of migration, families fear that the police may make them liable for their children’s unauthorised departures. Moreover, not only do these deaths occur amid widespread indifference, but families who demand answers from authorities are treated with angry replies and disrespect. “Every day, the National Navy returns migrants. Sometimes, we hear that one or two pirogues arrive in Spain, while others stay missing. And then, silence. They say nothing, do nothing,” says one activist, recalling a tragic shipwreck in Fass Boye just weeks before. To the activists, it is unacceptable that the Senegalese state uses its navy to patrol the coasts, yet does nothing to search for the disappeared or recover their bodies. After ten days since the pirogue’s departure from Fass Boye, members of the families went to the police to request that a search be initiated. The police officer assured them they would contact the navy and initiate the search. Another ten days went by, still no news, no sign of their children. When the families returned, they were told the navy had searched but found nothing, and promised they would try again. A full month after the pirogue’s departure, the village elders, the chief, the imam, and some fathers, returned to the police, hoping for answers. Instead, they were dismissed with

cruelty. “Get out of my office! I didn’t pay for your children’s journey, and I didn’t give them a pirogue. It’s not our problem,” one police officer allegedly said angrily. Some days later, they found out by word of mouth that the pirogue had allegedly capsized off the coast of Cape Verde, claiming the lives of 63 people. Such disregard from the authorities is not isolated, and many people during the Caravan shared receiving a similar treatment.

Besides, families generally lack knowledge about where to turn to and what they can ask for. Against this backdrop, the right to know also concerns families’ right to understand the avenues available to initiate the search of their loved ones. Although Boza Fii cannot assist families due to limited resources, they aim to ensure families at least know the necessary steps and receive support throughout. Providing this knowledge is a vital part of the Caravan, as navigating the complex legal and bureaucratic systems often exposes families to abuse or neglect from authorities. These resources are shared during workshops with local organisations and families of the missing. In front of a small group of people, Saliou, along other activists, shows the several routes people from Senegal take to get to Europe and emphasises that knowing these routes is essential to locating missing persons. If locating them proves difficult, as many individuals keep their migration plans secret, families are advised to reach out to friends or siblings who might know their last whereabouts. Sharing information among communities, they say, can help determine whether someone is missing, dead, or simply unable or unwilling to communicate with their family. One workshop participant describes a time when he was in Morocco and met someone from his village who had been presumed dead for years but was actually hiding from his family. Other cases discussed involved individuals concealing their identities out of fear of criminalisation or deportation. Another participant shared that her son left for Europe in 2020, and she recently discovered that he is imprisoned in Morocco, accused of being a smuggler. After discussing the various migration routes and reasons why individuals may be stranded, the workshop moves to the practical aspects of searching for a missing person. This is a crucial part of the session, as many families hesitate to begin the process due to complex government procedures and the negative reactions from authorities that often discourage seeking answers. Activists explain that missing persons can be reported at any police station, and the authorities are obligated to investigate and notify law enforcement in the country where the person is thought to be. The workshop also covers the necessary documents, information to help locate the person (such as identity documents, photos, and payment or communication methods like Orange Money, Western Union, Facebook, or WhatsApp), and, if the

person is found dead, physical characteristics or belongings that could aid in identification.

The Right to Identification and Burial



Figure 9. Lists of names of people disappeared at sea put up in Thies' central square. Photo by the author.

While the right to know is crucial for families, the Caravan also recognizes the dead bodies as people whose lives mattered, and as such, that still retain fundamental rights even in death, primarily, the right to be identified and receive a name, and to be buried according to their own spiritual beliefs. The right to identification is not just for the missing; it also reflects the needs of the families, as identification marks an important step in the grieving process. One of the videos shown during the Caravan highlights the monumental efforts of an Italian forensic team following one of the deadliest shipwrecks ever off the coast of Lampedusa in October 2013, when around 400 people lost their lives, and 366 bodies were recovered, many still trapped inside the sunken boat. This tragic event was a pivotal moment in recognising forced deaths by the European public. Due to its magnitude, European governments, particularly Italy, realised they could no longer turn a blind eye to this phenomenon. In the video, one of the forensics discusses the unprecedented efforts made after the shipwreck to identify the victims, give them names, locate their relatives, and return their remains. "It's important to do everything we can to give names to these people," the forensic states in the video, "as a gesture of respect for

human dignity and life.” Her words linger in the air as Saliou pauses the video to underline the concept: “Every missing person, including those who have died, has the right to be identified and not forgotten.”

Counting and naming are the most common forms of acknowledgments of forced deaths. During the Caravan, in each of the towns visited, banners with the names of those who perished in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic were publicly displayed. These lists, which represent only a small fraction of those who actually lost their lives, along with banners bearing slogans such as “A Name for Everyone,” “Numbers into Names,” and “Our Sons Also Have Dignity,” underscore the need to recognise the dead as more than mere statistics or physical remains, but as human beings with dreams and hopes, families and friends. While numbers alone do not help imagine, feel, or grasp the depth of loss, as they “do not account for the destruction of lives, the suffering and the loss” (Hyndman 2007:36), naming transforms the dead from statistics into individuals who once lived. Truly accounting for forced deaths, therefore, requires naming and telling the stories of those who perish. This serves as a reminder of the political nature of their deaths due to border violence, as well as the long-term social and political consequences not only for those who died but also for their families and communities.



Figure 10. One of the banners put up in every town saying one of the Caravan’s slogans: Numbers into Names, A Name for Everyone. Photo by the author.

While the Caravan serves as a platform to advocate against the ways in which the lives of migrants are closely monitored while they are alive, it also

highlights how, once they die, they become disposable, mere flesh whose lives are deemed unworthy of mourning and recognition. The activists draw attention to the lack of identification, which leads to uncertainty and ignorance surrounding the true number and identities of lives lost. In the activists' narrative, this widespread indifference stems not only from the inherent challenges of data collection (see also Carling 2007) but, more importantly, from political motives aimed at avoiding accountability for these deaths (see also Heller and Pécoud 2018). According to this narrative, failing to recover the bodies, identify them and count the deaths must be understood as a deliberate effort to downplay the scale of shipwrecks, particularly in official figures:

“How many have died in the desert, in the Mediterranean, in the vast Atlantic? No one knows for sure, because no one even knows how many left in the first place. A pirogue departs, carrying forty, perhaps fifty people. Later, the news trickles in: twelve survived. And the rest? No records, no names, no acknowledgment of their fate.”

If the right to identification and burial is crucial for restoring dignity to the dead, it is paramount for families, as most of them are left to mourn without a closure. The absence of a body, in fact, makes grief even more difficult, creating a situation of “ambiguous loss” (Boss 2004). Many parents who participated in the Caravan found themselves trapped in this painful limbo, unable to fully grieve without a body, as seen in Chapter VII. This need for closure resonates far beyond Senegal's borders. Along the shores of Zarzis, near the Libyan border, the sea returns nameless, unclaimed, and forgotten bodies. In the video screened during the Caravan about the Cemetery of the Unknown in Zarzis, the topic of burial is central. The video shows Chamseddine Marzouk, a Tunisian fisherman, walking through a makeshift cemetery, explaining that every person buried there came from West and Central Africa, departing from Libya in search of a better future. Yet, of all the graves, only one belongs to someone who has been identified. Since its creation, the number of deaths has been so overwhelming that the cemetery has expanded, growing with each new body that drifts ashore. Without identification, this burial ground becomes the only dignified resting place for people who lost their lives in an attempt to reach Europe. Towards the end of the video, talking directly to the families, Chamseddine launches an important message:

“I am here with them. You don't have to be afraid. They are properly buried, their bodies are respected. It is heartbreaking that you cannot

come to see your sons and daughters, but know this, I am here. I am their family.”

Across Senegal, many families have lost children who disappeared en route to or within North Africa, often after years of separation and silence. Their bodies may have washed ashore thousands of kilometres away, on the coasts of Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, or Algeria, without ever being identified. Without identification, the deceased cannot be honoured, and families are left suspended in grief. Death, in fact, rarely begins the moment vital functions cease but is rather culturally processed by the family and community through a series of codified practices that mark the passage between life and death. In Senegalese society, as in many others, the physical presence of a body is crucial to the mourning process, so much so that when someone dies abroad, some Wolof-Senegalese families might even request to open the casket to confirm the death (Ndiaye 2009). The same holds true for missing migrants. “Families cannot start mourning without a body,” Saliou explains. Having spent several years in North Africa, for some of the Boza Fii’s activists the reality of unidentified bodies washing ashore and left without a proper burial is deeply familiar. Some recall how, whenever they took part in burying a member of the Senegalese community in Morocco, they could not help but think of the families back home who would never know that their children had been buried and respected in death.

Sharing the story of Chamseddine Marzouk offers grieving Senegalese families the fragile yet meaningful hope that their loved ones are not entirely lost or forgotten, not condemned to remain nameless at the bottom of the sea, but may have been laid to rest somewhere with dignity. As one of the activists comments while showing the video, these images highlight the need to recognise the missing people’s right to a proper burial, making every effort to “return their remains to their families or, at the very least, let them know their children are properly buried somewhere else, as this would bring some peace to the parents’ minds.” His words resonate deeply with a testimony shared during a visit to the families, where a mother, who recently lost her son in a shipwreck, expressed her longing to know that, at least, her son was properly buried somewhere. She explained that knowing this would help her “heal her heart.” As Saliou claims, even if the remains of a person are not actually buried in Zaris or similar places elsewhere, knowing that such sites exist can offer some solace to families, giving them hope that “their child might be buried somewhere and well taken care of, so they don’t have to worry anymore.” He recalls a time when he was in Morocco, accompanying the mother of a

Senegalese friend who died at sea to visit a cemetery where unidentified people from Senegal had been buried. Even though her son was not actually buried there, he talks about the importance for her to “at least pray at a tomb,” as it gave her the feeling that “her son was actually somewhere.”

The video also gives the activists a chance to publicly propose the creation of a cemetery for the unknown in Senegal, an initiative that could provide families with a physical space to mourn and bring visibility to forced deaths. “Sometimes, you see parents of the missing go to the sea, just staring at it, crying, and then go back home,” Saliou explains. “If a cemetery of the unknown were to be created, at least people would have something concrete to mourn, but also a way to understand the disasters caused by migration policies” he adds. While North African governments often ignore the burial of non-citizens, leaving it to individuals like Chamseddine, activists denounce a similar neglect in Senegal, where “the government often bury people wherever without even notifying families.” Even when bodies are recovered, they claim, the identification process and family notification remain opaque. Victims are often buried hastily and without transparency, leaving families unaware of their loved ones’ fate. Recalling a shipwreck near St. Louis, one activist explains that bodies were scattered across different locations without properly informing families. “Why didn’t anyone take the trouble to search for the bodies and return them to their families, especially since the tragedy happened so close to home, on the Senegalese coast?” he asks. He suggests this may be a deliberate strategy by the government to downplay the tragedy, noting that “the total number of graves didn’t even come close to a tenth of those reported missing.”

Invoking the right to know, to identify, and to bury the dead restores their dignity, offers closure to families, and exposes the violent consequences of border externalisation. These policies strip people of mobility and dignity in life, and continue to exert this control in death, reducing them to nameless, unclaimed bodies. Asserting these rights is more than mourning, it constitutes a mobility practice that is both embodied and political. In this context, embodiment becomes a form of resistance: the dead body, denied mobility and rights in life, becomes central to acts of protest, remembrance, and accountability. It reclaims presence and visibility where the border seeks erasure. These claims restore justice for the living and dignity in death, confronting the dehumanising logics that render migrant lives disposable.

Reparations and Freedom of Movement



Figure 11. One of the discussions with local organisations and families of the missing in Mbour. Photo courtesy by Boza Fii.

The last video slowly fades to black, and the projector hums to silence, marking the event's nearing end. The energy shifts, a palpable heaviness replacing the lightness of music, laughter, and conversation that had filled the air at the start. The images on the screen, the discussions and the stories shared, now hang in the space. They expose a harsh reality that everyone in the audience encounters on a daily basis, but which is frequently muttered behind closed doors, and mourned in private homes. By bringing the raw truths of death and border violence into the central square of Thies, a schoolyard in St. Louis, the area in front of Mbour's town hall, and the sandy streets of Gandiol, the Caravan has broken through the walls of silence, shame, and denial, forcing people to look, to witness, and to confront the painful realities of border violence. Before the event ends, and the music returns to close the evening, Saliou steps forward once more. His voice is resolute as he urges the crowd to resist complacency: "We will fight for justice and reparations!" Witnessing and talking about it, he insists, is only the beginning. By framing border deaths as forced deaths, the Caravan emphasizes the injustices experienced not only by those who die but also by their families and communities, who endure both material and psychological losses (Gündoğdu 2022), and advocates for

reparations. Importantly, such claims can be understood as mobility practice as political action in its broadest, most collective sense, as they encompass the right of entire communities to seek justice, reparations, and freedom of movement.

Reparations are understood as “measures that wrongdoers offer to their victims to help repair harm that they have inflicted upon them” (Goldstone 2024: 766). While complete reparation aims to restore individuals to the position they would have been in had the harm never occurred, this is impossible in the case of forced deaths, where lost lives cannot be restored. Consequently, reparation efforts focus on mitigating harm as much as possible, through both symbolic and material means, as well as preventing future harms. Symbolic reparations involve publicly acknowledging wrongdoing, while material reparations address tangible losses (Mills 2019). In the context of forced deaths at the borders, activists demand a combination of symbolic and material reparations from both the EU and the Senegalese state, which they hold jointly responsible. From the Senegalese government, the activists primarily call for official acknowledgment of the state’s role, not only in failing to protect the right to stay but also in enforcing deadly border policies. As one activist puts it, the state “must tell the families the truth about what happened” and stop criminalising them by suggesting their loved ones “decided to die.” This demand highlights the need for the government to move away from its narrative that migrants leave to die and instead take responsibility by engaging directly with families.

This official acknowledgment is vital not only for validating the pain of affected families but also for challenging the normalisation of border violence and forced deaths. Recognising forced deaths as a consequence of border policies means accepting that families and communities endure profound material and psychological losses, and therefore deserve reparations. For the activists, compensation must include both material and immaterial forms: psychological and social support to validate the trauma endured, and economic assistance to address the ongoing hardships faced by families, especially the children left behind. As Saliou explains, and as we have seen in Chapter IV, VI and VIII, young people who migrate “are the support and hope of their families, so when they leave, it just creates a bigger hole, and when they die the hole becomes deeper and deeper.” The Senegalese state, he claims, should provide not only psychological and social care, “offering aid and follow-up to affected families,” but also economic support such as ensuring access to education for children of those who died at the borders. This dual approach

underscores the collective dimension of immobility and loss, moving beyond a narrow focus on individuals who cross the border to consider the broader social fabric disrupted by border violence. Recognising the state's limited resources, activists propose partnerships with EU-funded organisations working on migration and development projects to implement these reparative measures. While full material reparations may be difficult to achieve, the political significance of these demands lies in their public articulation, where calling for them remains a powerful form of mobility practice as political.

If addressing past wrongs through acknowledgment and compensation is a core element of reparations, the radical potential of the Caravan would fall short without embracing what Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò (2022b) calls a constructive view of reparations, one that is future-oriented and committed to building the conditions for a more just world. According to Táíwò, reparations should not only confront the enduring legacies of colonial domination and racial apartheid, but actively contribute to the transformation of global structures of inequality. In this spirit, Boza Fii activists push beyond redressing past harms caused by forced deaths, and put the vision of a more just mobility future at the centre of their demands:

“Migrating is not a crime, but a right, and we ask that it be made possible for all, safely, without risking their lives. People have the right to go and return as they wish, whenever they wish. I want people in my country to be able to travel if they desire, to have the choice to stay here or to leave, even without resources.”

In this way, Boza Fii places the right to freedom of movement at the centre of its reparative politics. Activists argue that countries in the EU should provide reparations to people migrating under conditions shaped by historical and ongoing forms of domination, colonialism, resource extraction, structural adjustment, and militarised border regimes:

“The European Union must know that migration did not start with Africans. It started with Europeans. They were the first to migrate to Africa. They came to Africa to take our resources, and now they do not want us to go there.”

This claim strongly resonates with growing scholarly calls to understand contemporary migration within the longer arc of colonial history and capitalist exploitation (Turner and Mayblin 2020; Lemberg-Pedersen et al. 2022; Ould Moctar 2024). Throughout the Caravan, this critique of neocolonial structures

is made explicit. In all the towns visited, the activists hung a banner asking, “What is colonialism today?” a provocation that sparked discussions about the many ways France and the EU continue to exert control over Senegal’s resources, while impeding reciprocal mobility. “If Europeans can come here, why can’t we go to their countries?” asks one activist during a heated discussion, “they came to our land first, colonised us without consent, took our people, and enslaved them. So why, after all that, should we still have to ask for permission to move?”



Figure 12. The banner “What is colonialism today” hung during the Caravan. Photo by the author.

In many of the rallies and discussions, activists consistently highlight how the systematic extraction of Senegal’s wealth, enabled by complicit national elites, has resulted in prosperity being “transferred to the other side.” As Saliou powerfully states, “if people search for our wealth here and cannot find it, it is only natural for them to go there to retrieve it.” Framing mobility as a form of reparation for injustices rooted in colonial and neocolonial exploitation repositions it as a political practice through which formerly colonised

populations actively contest the postcolonial order. In this sense, the Caravan's demands articulate mobility as political practice in its most radical form: a collective, future-oriented process of resistance, redress, and reclamation.

This narrative echoes broader critiques by no-border activists and critical decolonial scholars who argue that, if today's migration regimes are rooted in enduring colonial hierarchies, South–North mobility is not merely a response to economic precarity or violence, but a political act of redress against centuries of extraction, underdevelopment, and enclosure (Achieme 2019; Nevins 2019; Goldstone 2024; Walia 2013). From this perspective, people on the move do not need permission to relocate as they are asserting their right to rebalance the structural inequalities produced by colonial and neocolonial domination (Achieme 2019). This understanding is voiced directly by the activists themselves, who see mobility as a form of reparation in its own right. Their narratives reject the legitimacy of the legal frameworks that govern African movement to the EU, exposing how law operates as an instrument for the racialised governance of the border:

“For example, today, a white European can come to our country without a visa, but I must not leave without a visa. Isn't there a privilege in that? So if you impose a visa I cannot get, I'll find my own way. My visa is the sea! If I have to jump through hoops to travel legally, to respect laws imposed on us, at some point I just want to break them. I know the laws, but I try not to believe in them. Do you know why? Because the powerful make the law for themselves, not for us. These rules were never designed with people like me in mind; they were created to benefit people like you.”

If law serves to reproduce racialised exclusion and control, then Boza Fii's call to reject that law altogether, and to cross borders without authorisation becomes an act of decolonisation.

All in all, advocating for reparations lies at the heart of mobility as political practice in its most radical form. The Caravan's demands offer a way to understand mobility not as survival or humanitarian need, but as a claim to justice. From this perspective, migration must be approached through the lens of historical, political, and economic accountability, holding colonial and neocolonial systems responsible for enduring inequalities. Crucially, this reframing moves black mobility out of the realm of security and humanitarianism and into that of rights and justice, where those harmed are entitled to redress, reparation, and the freedom to move on their own terms.

Conclusions

By centring on the “Caravan for the Missing”, this chapter has shown how the encounter between externalised borders and people’s mobility generates friction within societies that are not themselves in motion but remain deeply entangled in the violence and politics of border control. The Caravan emerges as a counter-practice to border externalisation that politicises disappearance, demands accountability, and reclaims public space as a site of collective struggle. As such, the chapter complements Chapter VII by illuminating another form of engagement with border externalisation that gives rise to organised, embodied, and public opposition. Within this framework, mobility practice becomes a terrain of struggle, manifested through embodied presence and political action.

As an example of mobility as an embodied practice, the Caravan is led and sustained by those who have directly endured the violence of the border: returnees and families of the disappeared. Their bodies, present in the gatherings in public squares, carry the memory and the marks of border violence. The campaign centres the figure of the missing migrant, whose absent body becomes a material trace of border violence that unites different forms of suffering and mobilisation. For activists, the body invokes their own survival and the trauma inscribed on their flesh; for families and communities, it represents the persistent, embodied experience of waiting, grieving, and not knowing; and for the disappeared themselves, their fate speaks to the ultimate embodiment of mobility practice, a movement paid for with their lives. In this way, the missing body stands at the intersection of loss and resistance, anchoring mobility practice as an embodied collective experience that fosters empathy by restoring humanity to those rendered disposable by the border regime. Through the Caravan, the disappeared are made visible, mourned, and remembered as political subjects, as their absence galvanises the presence of dissenting bodies, grieving families, and defiant communities that claim space, narrate loss, and demand justice. As such, this embodied dimension of the Caravan becomes the ground from which political claims emerge.

In the context of the Caravan, mobility as a political practice refers to the strategic reappropriation of both movement and its denial as tools to contest the racialised violence of border regimes. First, by reframing border deaths as forced deaths and insisting on the respect for the rights and dignity of the deceased and their families, the Caravan challenges the normalisation of state-

sanctioned violence and disrupts the dominant discursive frameworks that dehumanise people on the move through processes of criminalisation, pathologisation, and moral condemnation. The figure of the missing migrant becomes a central political signifier through which the Caravan destabilises dominant narratives that render black mobility suspect, criminal, and disposable. This resignification exposes border deaths not as exceptional or accidental, but as structurally produced outcomes of a global regime of mobility apartheid. Second, holding both the EU and the Senegalese government accountable for these deaths is central to mobility as a political practice, highlighting how national and international political structures perpetuate border violence as a racialised and systemic mode of governance. This dual accountability exposes the complicity of postcolonial states in upholding a global mobility regime that continues to value certain lives over others, reinscribing colonial hierarchies through the management, containment, and elimination of black movement. This regime is sustained through unequal visa agreements, resource plundering, and neoliberal conditionalities that bind mobility control to economic dependence, turning migration governance into a tool of extraction and externalised policing. Third, by linking accountability to the recognition of the deceased's families and their inherent dignity, the Caravan mobilises mobility as a political practice oriented toward reparations both as redress for historical and ongoing violences and as a forward-looking demand for equitable futures of movement. Crucially, by framing freedom of movement as an act of reparation, it displaces dominant securitised and humanitarian narratives, repositioning mobility within the terrain of social justice. In doing so, it embodies the most radical potential of mobility practice as a transformative, reparative political claim challenging racialised power structures.

By centring grassroots opposition to border externalisation and its lethal consequences, this chapter advances a decolonial feminist approach that amplifies the narratives and embodied experiences of those most affected. Grounded in local realities and everyday struggles, these voices challenge dominant Eurocentric and securitised discourses on mobility and borders, actively resisting policies that produce death and exclusion. The chapter makes visible the political agency of marginalised communities as they mobilise in public spaces across Senegal to demand recognition of border deaths and the documentation of their lived experiences. In doing so, the protagonists not only contest state erasure but also enact a form of political witnessing that insists on the visibility of their suffering and the accountability of governing institutions,

thereby contributing to decolonial feminist praxis by reclaiming sovereignty over their stories and reshaping mobility as a site of justice and resistance.

Concluding reflections

After almost two hours in the traffic jam of Dakar, the taxi finally drops me off at Blaise Diagne International Airport, just in time to not miss my flight. Before I get out, the taxi driver wishes me good luck with my journey back home. He adds, with a hopeful smile, that maybe one day I will meet his son in Europe. I smile back, thinking of his son, who departed from “Bargny Airport.” I wonder whether people wish you *bon voyage* in the same way when you are about to board a pirogue. At the airport, my passport is checked six times before I can finally board. On my way to Senegal, it had only been checked three: at departure, before boarding, and once upon arrival. I cannot help noticing the difference. Mobility from Europe to Senegal feels ordinary, unmarked. But from Senegal to Europe, it becomes suspect, something to be closely checked, monitored, held in question. Movement in one direction is travel; in the other, it risks becoming irregular migration. As I sit on the plane, I receive a message from Bocar. He asks how I am doing. He has been in Morocco for months since I last saw him, waiting for the right moment to cross. Meanwhile, I am on a plane that will take me to Italy in just a few hours. I tell him I am about to leave Senegal. He replies that he misses his home so much, and then, in his usual joking tone, adds: “Well, maybe one of these days I’ll take a pirogue and come visit you.”

The unevenness of our mobilities stays with me as the plane takes off. It brings back a conversation I once had with Bocar and his friends, when they told me that no one had ever asked them about their journey, and that they hoped I would go back to Europe and tell their story. Now, as I approach the conclusion of this thesis, the fact that I can easily travel back and forth on a plane while Bocar is still waiting in Morocco only deepens my awareness of the responsibility I carry. If no academic piece of writing can undo the material reality of border violence, it can at least honour and amplify the lives and narratives entrusted to me, carrying them beyond the spaces where they are often confined, and making visible both the injustices endured and the visions of life, dignity, and mobility that persist despite them. As I approach the end of this work, I wonder if I have even remotely been able to convey the courage,

the dreams, the dignity, and the determination present in each and every one of the stories I have recounted. I began this thesis by asking how Senegalese individuals and communities experience and respond to European border externalisation, with the aim of understanding how their lives are both constrained and enabled by the presence of these policies, even in a context far removed from the EU. Throughout the five empirical chapters of this thesis, I have answered this question (and related sub-questions) by following the stories of people whose lives have been deeply affected by border externalisation. In the midst of accounts of violence, deprivation, and loss, their narratives have also carried a life-affirming force rooted in acts of care, endurance, creativity, and the persistent imagining of futures beyond the constraints imposed on them. In bringing these narratives to the forefront, this thesis speaks back to state-centric perspectives that reduce the agency of the subalternised to a single, narrow form, and instead offers a more nuanced understanding of how agency is enacted under conditions of structural constraint. It contributes to the refinement of key concepts in border and migration studies, showing that the engagement with borders is not only about (gendered and racialised) harm, but also about how people hope, practice solidarity, forge new collectivities, and develop political consciousness. It also advances analyses of the gendered political economy of EU border externalisation and demonstrates how border violence can operate as a tool of deterrence, but also as a catalyst for collective mobilisation, strategic survival and the articulation of a radical decolonial and abolitionist critique of borders.

Chapter IV has examined how border externalisation unfolds within pre-existing socio-economic and cultural conditions that influence how people conceive of their mobility. In particular, it has highlighted the role of family structures and socio-cultural norms, especially gender, in shaping the ways mobility is imagined and anticipated. The chapter has also delved into how these norms impact who gets to move, and how gendered notions of success and family shape the mobility choices of individuals. It has further shown how the image of Europe as a land of opportunity is shaped by border closures, media and social networks that fuel the will to move. While romanticised, this idea becomes more realistic as people consider Europe as a space for better life opportunities, aligned with their personal and professional aspirations. This chapter has finally explored permissible mobility trajectories, demonstrating how people imagine alternative forms of mobility when legal and safe routes are precluded, and how these trajectories are shaped by family histories of mobility, as well as other personal and socio-cultural considerations. By focusing on imagination and socio-cultural gender norms, it has complicated

accounts of mobility and border externalisation that treat movement solely as a reaction to necessity, instead showing how aspirations, expectations, and permissible trajectories are co-produced through the interplay of structural constraints, personal desires, and deeply embedded cultural and family frameworks.

Chapter V has examined how Senegalese individuals experience mobility during the act of border crossing. It has outlined the two main “backdoors” they use when legal and safe travel is impossible: the Atlantic backdoor, focusing on the perilous crossing of the Atlantic on precarious boats; and the land backdoor, which explores the varied routes people take from Mauritania to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya, often relying on intermediaries. This chapter has exposed the multiple forms of border violence people endure: from state structures like border guards and fences, to non-state actors such as bandits, smugglers, and ordinary citizens. It also includes the necropolitical use of geography in border policies, where the sea and the desert themselves become lethal zones. Despite these pervasive forms of violence, this chapter has also complicated portrayals of border externalisation as solely accounts of suffering, foregrounding instead the agency of people on the move, who navigate their im/mobility through a range of strategies, from negotiating with border authorities, bandits, and smugglers to hiding and supporting one another along the way. Moreover, this chapter has highlighted how these experiences are gendered, with women being more vulnerable during the journey, not only to gender-based violence but also to perceptions that they are less capable of making decisions or moving through certain backdoors. At the same time, it has shown how women are able to leverage this vulnerability to their advantage, as seen in their strategies for relying on protection and support.

Chapter VI has focused on forced “backward mobility,” examining deportation as a central aspect of border externalisation policies and highlighting the multiple forms of violence it entails, including the physical removal, administrative and bureaucratic coercion, the absence of institutional care, and the pervasive social stigma and shame experienced upon return. The first section has examined the violence of forced return from North and Central Africa, and Europe, highlighting how border authorities in Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Europe intensify the trauma of the return journey through imprisonment, physical violence, administrative violence, neglect and brutality, compounding the violence experienced during the outward journey. Furthermore, it has highlighted the complicity of international organisations like IOM in forced returns, which, while providing short-term assistance,

contribute to the broader system of violence and precarity. The second part of the chapter has focused on the reintegration processes, showing how forced return interacts with socio-cultural and gendered expectations. It has demonstrated how, upon return, men feel emasculated when unable to fulfil societal norms of marriage and fatherhood, while women are often pushed back into traditional gender roles, either voluntarily or through coercion. Yet, the chapter has also illustrated how individuals can reclaim their agency after forced return, whether by owning their journey through self-growth, reestablishing mobility, or forming “returnee” organisations to restore their sense of masculinity and agency within their families and communities. In doing so, the chapter contributes to studies of mobility and border externalisation by showing that forced return is not only a site of violence and precarity, but also a space where individuals negotiate, resist, and reimagine their mobility, challenging both simplistic accounts of return as purely disempowering and narratives that frame return as an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Chapter VII has explored how families in Senegal, particularly mothers, experience the loss of loved ones due to border externalisation, thereby adding an additional socio-familial and gendered layer to studies of border externalisation. The first section has focused on the pain, financial hardship, and social judgment mothers face. The second section examines how they transform this loss into a collective experience, organising women’s groups that allow them to share their grief, provide mutual support, and attract external funding, ultimately enhancing women’s status within their communities through the image of the grieving mother. As such, this chapter has shown both how the violence of border externalisation affects families in a gender way, and how women are able to reclaim this pain and navigate it to their advantage. The gendered aspect is crucial here, as the absence of a loved one is socially and culturally negotiated within the woman’s role as wife and mother.

Finally, Chapter VIII has looked at how (a part of) civil society in Senegal responds to border externalisation by actively opposing it. This chapter, in many ways, complements Chapter VII as it also addresses the experience of loss, but through the lens of open resistance and activism, predominantly among men. It shows how individuals, families, and communities who have directly faced border violence come together in towns across Senegal to challenge narratives on border externalisation through a local decolonial perspective, fight the criminalisation of unauthorised mobility, and demand justice for those who have died at the borders. As such, this chapter

demonstrates that border externalisation is not merely a top-down imposition of power but is also actively reappropriated by those it seeks to constrain, transforming experiences of violence and loss into sites of collective mobilisation, protest, and political intervention. This final chapter thus brings together the threads of the previous ones, showing how the experience of border externalisation gives rise to spaces of resistance and re-signification.

Towards Knowledge as Epistemic Justice

Together, these chapters advance a decolonial feminist approach to border externalisation by foregrounding a bottom-up perspective that centres how individuals are impacted by these policies and how they actively respond to them. A significant portion of knowledge about im/mobility is produced by those directly impacted by border externalisation, knowledge that is both situated and embodied, yet this knowledge rarely reaches the larger public or academic spaces. Recognising this form of from-below knowledge as not only valid but also central to understanding phenomena such as borders and migration aligns with a decolonial feminist epistemology, which foregrounds the epistemic privilege of those who have lived through certain realities. Their experiences are critical sources of knowledge, shifting them from objects of study to active subjects of knowledge production. In centring these voices, the research disrupts conventional knowledge production about border externalisation, which often privileges perspectives from or about Europe, and from the state. Instead, it engages with those whose experiences are frequently marginalised, revealing how people navigate, resist, and give meaning to their encounters with border regimes through their own narratives. As such, the decision to include numerous quotes and make the empirical chapters primarily about people's stories, with my theorisation appearing mainly in the conclusion or only as much as necessary to guide the reader through the text, should be viewed as a deliberate choice to prioritise people's voices and experiences.

In this sense, this thesis contributes to knowledge as a form of epistemic justice. By showing how people produce knowledge through their encounters with borders grounded in their direct experiences of border violence, this work challenges numerous assumptions underlying border externalisation policies, assumptions that come largely from knowledge created without listening to the people who have embodied, situated knowledge of border externalisation.

These include, among others, the idea that mobility is exceptional, that people can be kept in place through financial incentives, that migration is driven primarily by poverty, hunger, or war, that people on the move are uninformed, and that people's journeys are linear from Africa to Europe. It also counters many logics that justify externalised border policies, such as that people on the move are a disorganised and naive mass, coerced into dangerous journeys by smugglers, or that deaths at sea are inevitable collateral damage of border policies that save lives. Additionally, it challenges the stereotypes of female immobility, passivity, and economic dependency, as well as the tendency, also present in much of the critical literature, to reduce women's journeys to narratives of gender-based violence and helplessness. While these aspects are undeniably important, the women in these stories chose not to focus on them, which in itself serves as a powerful reminder of what truly matters to people on the move and which parts of their stories they want to be told. Challenging many of these biases is only possible by listening to the people themselves and bringing their knowledge to the forefront.

This thesis pays particular attention to the knowledge of women, those who move and those who do not, all of whom are generally excluded from the knowledge production surrounding border externalisation. By centring these voices, the thesis contributes to the production of gendered and embodied knowledge on border externalisation and, more broadly, to an understanding of migration and mobility as deeply gendered experiences. It also highlights the growing importance, reflected in recent literature, of including the voices of those who have long been absent from academic and political debates. Decolonising and feminising the gaze on border externalisation by centring people's knowledge does not mean adopting a narrow or romanticised view of how individuals navigate im/mobility. Rather, it calls for the recognition and restoration of agency and dignity to those whose stories have long been overshadowed by state-centric narratives. When their voices are acknowledged, they are often cast in roles of passive victimhood or, at times, co-opted by progressive movements as symbols to advance agendas like freedom of movement and open borders, imposing a resistant subjectivity that they may not claim for themselves. In an effort to carefully avoid both tendencies, this research has attempted to centre people's knowledge, acting as a megaphone to their efforts to have a place in the history of European border externalisation on their own terms, neither as victims nor heroes, but as protagonists, not mere subjects of policies imposed upon them. The marginalisation of people on the move, particularly women, in studies of border externalisation align with the logics of border policies themselves,

which dehumanise and render voiceless those whose lives are easily sacrificed to justify the violence of the border regime. By focusing on the active experiences of people on the move, especially women, who have been almost entirely absent from these debates, this thesis encourages a rethinking of border externalisation policies that positions people on the move as political subjects and reconsiders these policies from their own situated perspectives.

Last but not least, a decolonial feminist approach centred on the voices of those with epistemic advantage regarding border knowledge is not an uncritical or fetishised celebration of “African” societies or people, nor a reduction of all evils to colonisation and present-day exploitative power dynamics, which in itself would strip locals of their agency and reduce them to mere products of external forces (Táiwò 2022a). By highlighting how border externalisation intersects with local dynamics, such as pervasive patriarchy and often oppressive family structures, this thesis also illuminates how the violence of the border is often compounded by the violence within local contexts. Moreover, by highlighting the complicity of the Senegalese state and how people openly criticise their own government, it shows that, like many others across Africa, the Senegalese government has actively contributed to shaping externalisation policies and, in doing so, has perpetuated the very violence these policies produce. At the same time, by illuminating both the intimate and broader arenas in which people negotiate border externalisation, this research demonstrates that its outcomes are not solely determined by oppressive North-to-South dynamics. Instead, it reveals how individuals actively work to subvert these dynamics, at times reversing them to their advantage or forging their own pathways within, against, and beyond oppressive border structures.

Theorising Border Externalisation From Below

By centring this bottom-up knowledge, this thesis has contributed to theoretical advancements in the ongoing debate on border externalisation, analysed through the frameworks of colonial encounters and mobility practice. These two concepts are a direct reflection of the development of the epistemic knowledge of the people I have encountered in dialogue with previous theories. As should be evident from the numerous stories woven throughout this thesis, the creation of these concepts, as well as many of the reflections shared in the theoretical chapters, have been profoundly shaped and influenced by the

experiences, perspectives, and worldviews of those whose stories I have had the privilege of engaging with.

The first concept I have contributed with is the concept of colonial encounter. One of the strengths of this concept lies in its ability to capture the space in-between, by engaging with both structural elements and agency. Focusing on the intersections between border externalisation and people's mobility, this research has endeavoured to avoid the pitfall of merely addressing policies or, alternatively, the individual's agency in isolation. Instead, it has highlighted how people's im/mobility interacts with the broader structures that produce and are produced by it. In this sense, the colonial encounters explored in this thesis do not result in either a complete surrender to border logics or a total liberation from structural oppressions. Moreover, discussing colonial encounters has allowed me to show that these encounters do not occur in a vacuum; they unfold within pre-existing structures of domination rooted in colonial and neocolonial forms of control, of which border externalisation is a part. These encounters also take place within specific socio-cultural and gendered local dynamics, which significantly influence how they are experienced.

Through this lens, the thesis has explored various instances of colonial encounters. It has explored the encounter between border externalisation and mobility in the ways people on the move are surveilled, tracked, immobilised, brutalised, and forced to change routes and strategies (Chapters V and VI). It has also examined encounters between the broader Senegalese population and border externalisation, including when movement does not take place (Chapters IV, VI, and VIII). Furthermore, the thesis has analysed encounters between families and border externalisation, particularly with mothers and wives, but also with broader family structures in the pressure to move, the stigmatisation of returnees and the taboo surrounding border deaths (Chapter IV, VII, VII). Lastly, the research has analysed the encounter between border externalisation and civil society's resistance or strategic compliance with these policies, offering examples of active resistance like the Caravan and more subtle forms of strategic compliance like the mothers' collectives or professional returnees (Chapter VI, VII, and VIII).

The second related theoretical contribution lies in the concept of black mobility practice, which captures the framework of action emerging from the colonial encounter and the space of possibilities created when people's will to move confronts the violence of border externalisation. Mobility precedes and

exceeds borders, therefore allowing to capture a much broader spectrum of possibilities within the colonial encounter, thereby broadening the analytical gaze and opening new avenues for understanding how movement is shaped, negotiated, and resisted. This shift allows research to move beyond the migratisation tendency highlighted in the introduction, uncovering new forms of agency that would otherwise be overlooked if we focused solely on borders or on “migrants”, such as those of people who, though far from any physical border, may not migrate yet remain vulnerable to the same targeting and exclusion. In this sense, the concept of mobility practice allows us to think of mobility not just as geographically or temporally constrained, but as a broader framework that captures agency beyond the act of crossing borders (thereby moving beyond an exclusive focus on those who physically cross) and extends to the moments before and after movement, offering a deeper understanding of how border externalisation shapes lives across time, *before*, *during* and *after* the border crossing occurs. This challenges the focus in migration and border studies on migrants who “successfully” reach Europe, often neglecting those whose mobility never starts or is interrupted, and the communities they leave behind. The lens of mobility allows instead for an examination of the experiences, strategies, and political significance of populations whose movement unfolds in a non-linear way and without a fixed endpoint. Looking at mobility also illuminates its far-reaching consequences, shaping not only how people perceive and engage with the world but also how they inhabit their own bodies, whether in movement or in stasis. In this sense, mobility carries paradoxical consequences: it can inflict profound and enduring trauma while simultaneously creating spaces for empowerment and resilience. Its marks are inscribed physically, emotionally, and psychologically, accompanying individuals across their journeys, shaping the lives of their families and communities in places of origin, and extending into broader collective realities by influencing social and political landscapes. Overall, the theoretical lens of mobility practice resists simplified portrayals of migration as linear, one-way, and individual journeys that reduce movement to a decontextualised and depoliticised phenomenon, obscuring the historical, structural, and socio-cultural forces that shape it; instead, it foregrounds the multiplicity of ideas, imaginaries, and social relations that constitute people’s everyday encounters with borders, revealing mobility as a dynamic, contested, and deeply political process. Throughout the thesis, I have explored three key instances of mobility practice: imagined, embodied, and political. These are not exhaustive. Rather,

the concept of mobility practice invites further exploration, offering space for scholars to identify additional dimensions that may extend beyond the three highlighted in this work.

Mobility practice as imagined has captured an often-neglected aspect of the mobility experience. Without resorting to a simplistic explanation of the drivers of migration that attempt to explain why people migrate, it has considered the dimension of imagination in the encounter between migratory policies and people's will to move. Considering this dimension has allowed us to view mobility as an experience that begins in the mind, even before physical movement occurs, and continues to shape communities, families, and individuals' strategies, aspirations, and social relations. As such, it has opened up the exploration of a range of often neglected individual and collective experiences that matter for how border externalisation is felt, such as desires, anticipations, beliefs and hopes.

Mobility practice as embodied has captured another fundamental aspect of mobility, highlighting the role of intimacy, emotion, and the body, without resorting to an essentialist or biological view. It has allowed us to think about mobility as an embodied experience, where key moments of bodily distress and pain occur at the physical or emotional level, but also ways in which the body and bodily sensations are reappropriated in various ways. Mobility practice as embodied has allowed us to explore a wide range of bodily experiences, from violence, death, exhaustion, hunger, displacement, and trauma to more positive experiences such as resilience, solidarity and care, all of which are deeply felt and shaped by migration and border externalisation. These experiences must be taken seriously when analysing the effects of border externalisation, as the body is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of im/mobility, whether immobilised or mobile, and to connecting the different scales at which mobility is both enacted and felt.

Mobility practice as political has captured yet another key aspect of im/mobility, emphasising the role of power struggles, without reducing the gaze to an exclusive focus on resistance as a conscious and overt opposition to an imposed domination. It has enabled us to view mobility practice as a political act across a spectrum of possibilities, ranging from subtle forms of agency to more overt acts of resistance, capturing everything from moving despite imposed limitations to expressions of quiet or open defiance. Here, mobility as a political practice reveals that political action extends beyond defying the established norms of the border system. It also challenges other

oppressive structures, such as patriarchal or family norms. This perspective enables us to explore a broad spectrum of experiences, from overt resistance to the subtle ways people navigate daily life in contexts shaped by border violence. In doing so, it demonstrates that all of these, whether vocal or quiet, deserve recognition as political acts of insubordination when analysing the impact of border externalisation.

In sum, this thesis theoretically advances studies on border externalisation, but also on migration and borders more generally, by centring mobility as both a method, analytical lens, and lived experience. While much of the existing literature has focused on borders and their effects, this research shifts the gaze to mobility, revealing insights that would remain invisible if we only observed the border. As a method, mobility shaped the conduct of this research, allowing me to “follow” mobility by tracing routes, journeys, and stories across places, even when far away of apparently disconnected from borders. This comprehensive, mobility-oriented approach allowed me to identify a broad range of dynamics and actors relevant to border externalisation, showing how its impacts extend beyond those who physically cross borders to shape the everyday lives, social relations, and intimate spaces of people who might initially appear disconnected from frontier zones or border regimes. As an analytical lens, mobility provides a conceptual framework for understanding how border externalisation interacts with these social relations, life trajectories, and community dynamics, while simultaneously functioning as a site of both suffering and empowerment. Finally, by attending to mobility as lived experienced, this research foregrounds the phenomenological realities of people in the Euro-Senegalese borderlands, showing how movement occurs across spatial and temporal scales, and how these experiences reproduce, transform, or resist the coloniality embedded in border regimes. As such, the theoretical contribution of this thesis lies not simply in reversing the gaze from the border to mobility as experienced from below, but in showing what becomes visible when we do so: the embeddedness of mobility in everyday life of communities, the co-constitution of borders and social relations, and the generative and life-affirming dynamics that unfold when people navigate border regimes.

Ways Forward

By responding to current calls to decentralise (Zardo and Wolff 2022), decolonise (Cobarrubias et al. 2023; Cobarrubias and Lemberg-Pedersen 2025), and gender (Schmoll 2020; Freedman et al. 2023; Cappiali and Pacciardi 2024) the field of border externalisation and migration studies more in general (Turner and Mayblin 2020), this thesis has attempted to foreground the epistemic contributions of those most affected by border violence. However, much remains to be explored, paving way for further research in different yet complementary directions.

First, this research underscores the importance of further investigating the knowledge produced by those affected by border externalisation, particularly through a gender-sensitive lens. Future studies could delve deeper into the experiences not only of mothers and wives, as explored here in the Senegalese context, but also of fathers, brothers, and sisters of those on the move. Similarly, there is a critical need to focus more explicitly on women who move, a group that remains underrepresented in the literature, particularly in the context of Senegal and broader West and Central Africa, where women's trajectories deserve dedicated attention beyond victimising frameworks. While this thesis has made a deliberate effort to address their absence, it was not able to fully capture their perspectives, due in part to linguistic limitations and the challenges of accessing certain contexts. I hope that future research, particularly by women scholars from West Africa, will be able to engage more deeply with these voices and perspectives.

Second, further research could expand our understanding of civil society's political agency, particularly in spaces affected by externalisation. While this thesis has analysed some such instances, there is growing evidence of both quiet and overt forms of resistance emerging across regions targeted by externalisation policies beyond Senegal. Women's collectives, grassroots organisations, and youth groups may all be sites of political contestation worthy of deeper ethnographic and theoretical engagement.

Third, return and deportation remain under-explored dimensions of border externalisation. Most existing research on return in this area focuses on reintegration processes without fully analysing the structural entanglements between return and externalisation. This thesis has begun to explore this through a gendered and embodied narrative of return from Europe and North

and West Africa; however, much more research is needed, particularly to centre the experiences of women returnees, whose perspectives are only sporadically present in my empirical material. In a political climate where forced returns are becoming an increasingly central component of migration management policies, there is an urgent need for scholars to investigate their implications through a gender-sensitive lens that includes women.

Fourth, more attention should be paid to those who engage with the infrastructures of externalisation, such as so-called “professional returnees” or local actors who work in migration management, reintegration programs, or humanitarian organisations. While this research has touched on some of these dynamics, future studies could further explore how individuals navigate, contest, or capitalise on the migration industry, and how these practices are shaped by gender, class, and socio-cultural norms. Aside from the example of the mothers’ collective, an instance of professional engagement with border externalisation policies by women, this research has largely left unexplored the role of women in returnee associations, a dimension that would be valuable to investigate further in Senegal and beyond.

Finally, another important avenue for further research is the networks of intermediaries, guides, and facilitators, framed as “smugglers,” who play crucial roles in shaping mobility trajectories. While some work has been conducted on smuggling networks in North Africa, there is still limited empirical and conceptual engagement with these figures in West Africa. My own research has only scratched the surface of these networks, which remain deeply context specific. Furthermore, while some of the people I spoke to mentioned women as key links, research has yet to fully address this gender dimension, calling for further exploration. In a political climate where border policies are increasingly framed around the figure of the smuggler, and where the necessity of such policies is often justified by targeting these actors, it becomes even more urgent to resist oversimplifications and instead pursue nuanced understandings of who these actors are, how they operate, and how they are differently positioned within the broader political economy of migration.

References

- Achilli, L. (2018). The “good” smuggler: The ethics and morals of human smuggling among Syrians. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 676(1), 77–96.
- Achiume, T. (2019). Migration as decolonisation. *Stanford Law Review*, 71(6), 1509-1574.
- Achiume, T. (2022). Racial borders. *Georgetown Law Journal*, 110(3), 445-508.
- Ackerly, B. A., & True, J. (2019). *Doing feminist research in political and social science*. Red Globe Press.
- Adam, I., Trauner, F., Jegen, L., & Roos, C. (2020). West African interests in (EU) migration policy. Balancing domestic priorities with external incentives. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(15), 3101–3118.
- Adey, P., Bissell, D., Hannam, K., Merriman, P., & Sheller, M. (Eds.). (2013). *The Routledge handbook of mobilities*. Routledge.
- Agne, M. (2020). L’État face au phénomène de la migration irrégulière vers l’Europe : À la recherche de la souveraineté migratoire du Sénégal. *Revue Africaine de Sociologie*, 26(2), 39-75.
- Ahmad, A. N. (2009). Bodies that (don’t) matter: Desire, eroticism and melancholia in Pakistani labour migration. *Mobilities*, 4(3), 309–327.
- Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. Routledge.
- Ahmed, S. (2007). A phenomenology of whiteness. *Feminist Theory*, 8(2), 149-168.

- Ahmed, S. (2014). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Altai Consulting. (2023). *EUTF Monitoring and Learning System SLC 2023 Report*. <https://www.altaiconsulting.com/insights/monitoring-%26-learning-system-for-the-eu-trust-fund-for-africa%2C-sahel-region>
- Altundal, U. (2022). The open borders debate, migration as settlement, and the right to travel. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*. Advance online publication.
- Amelung, N., Scheel, S., & van Reekum, R. (2024). Reinventing the politics of knowledge production in migration studies: Introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Advance online publication.
- Amin, S. (2009) *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy*. 2nd edition. Delhi: Aakar Books
- Amselle, J.-L., & Diagne, S. B. (Eds.). (2018). En quête d'Afrique(s): Universalisme et pensée décoloniale. Albin Michel.
- Anctil Avoine, P. (2022). Insurgent peace research: Affects, friendship and feminism as methods. *Conflict, Security & Development*, 22(5), 435–455.
- Anctil Avoine, P. (2024). Farianas' insurgent feminism: For a militant, affective and embodied reincorporation in Colombia. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 7(1), 63-80.
- Anderson, B. (2017). Towards a new politics of migration? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(9), 1527-1537.
- Anderson, J. M. (1991). Reflexivity in fieldwork: Towards a feminist epistemology. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 23(2), 115-118.
- Andersson, R. (2014). *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine migration and the business of bordering Europe*. University of California Press.
- Andrews, M., Squire, C., & Tamboukou, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Doing narrative research*. SAGE Publications.

- Andrews, M., Kinnvall, C. & Monroe, K. (2015). Narratives of (in)security: Nationhood, culture, religion, and gender. Introduction to the special issue. *Political Psychology*, 36(2): 141–9.
- Andrijasevic, R., & Walters, W. (2010). The International organisation for Migration and the international government of borders. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(6), 977–999.
- Angone, O. (2020). *Femmes noires francophones: Une réflexion sur le patriarcat et le racisme aux XX-XXIe siècles*. Karthala Éditions.
- Antoine, P., & Sow, O. (2000). Rapports de genre et dynamiques migratoires: Le cas de l'Afrique de l'Ouest. In M. Bozon & T. Locoh (Eds.), *Rapports de genre et questions de populations. Genre, Population et Développement* (INED Dossiers et Recherches No. 85, pp. 143-159). INED.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1998). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new mestiza*. Aunt Lute Books.
- Applebaum, B. (2010). *Being white, being good: White complicity, white moral responsibility, and social justice pedagogy*. Lexington Books.
- Aziani, A. (2023). The heterogeneity of human smugglers: A reflection on the use of concepts in studies on the smuggling of migrants. *Trends in Organisational Crime*, 26(1), 80–106.
- Ba, O. (2022). ‘The Europeans and Americans don’t know Africa’: Of translation, interpretation, and extraction. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 50(2), 548-560.
- Babou, C. A. (2008). Migration and cultural change: Money, “caste,” gender, and social status among Senegalese female hair braiders in the United States. *Africa Today*, 55(2), 3–22.
- Bachelet, S. (2025). *The Adventure: Violent borders, illegal migration, and the uncertain quest for life in Morocco*. Manchester University Press.
- Balibar, E., & Wallerstein, I. (1991). *Race, nation, class: Ambiguous identities*. Verso.

- Beauchemin, C., Lessault, D., & Sakho, P. (2013). Dakar : Des ménages mieux logés grâce aux migrants ? In C. Beauchemin, L. Kabbanji, P. Sakho, & B. Schoumaker (Eds.), *Migrations africaines : le codéveloppement en questions. Essai de démographie politique* (pp. 159-190). Armand Colin.
- Beauchemin, C., Sakho, P., Schoumaker, B., & Flahaux, M.-L. (2018). *New patterns of migration between Senegal and Europe* (MAFE Working Paper No. 21).
- Bialasiewicz, L. (2012). Off-shoring and out-sourcing the borders of Europe: Libya and EU border work in the Mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, 17(4), 843–866.
- Bigo, D., & Guild, E. (2005). Policing at a distance: Schengen visa policies. In D. Bigo & E. Guild (Eds.), *Controlling frontiers: Free movement into and within Europe* (pp. 233–274). Ashgate.
- Bigo, D., & Guild, E. (2010). The transformation of European border controls. In B. Ryan & V. Mitsilegas (Eds.), *Extraterritorial immigration control: Legal challenges* (pp. 257–279). Brill.
- Boatema Setrana, M., & Kleist, N. (2022). Gendered dynamics in West African migration. In *Migration in West Africa: IMISCOE Regional Reader* (pp. 267-282). Springer International Publishing.
- Boedeltje, F., & Van Houtum, H. (2011). Introduction to a special section and Brussels is speaking: The adverse speech geopolitics of the European Union towards its neighbours. *Geopolitics*, 16(1), 121–145.
- Boer Cueva, A. R., Giri, K., Hamilton, C., & Shepherd, L. (2024). A decolonial feminist politics of fieldwork: Centering community, reflexivity, and loving accountability. *International Studies Review*, 26(1), 1-26.
- Bookchin, N., Brown, P., Ebrahimian, S., Colectivo Enmedio, Juhasz, A., Martin MTL, L., Mirzoeff, N., Ross, A., Saab, A. J., & Sitrin, M. (2013). *Militant research handbook*. New York University.
- Bop, C. (1995). Les femmes chefs de famille à Dakar. *Africa Development / Afrique et Développement*, 20(4), 51–67.

- Boswell, C. (2003). The 'external dimension' of EU immigration and asylum policy. *International Affairs*, 79(3), 619–638.
- Bosworth, M., Fili, A., & Pickering, S. (2018). Women and border policing at the edges of Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(13), 2182–2196.
- Bouilly, E. (2008). La couverture médiatique du Collectif pour la lutte contre l'immigration clandestine de Thiaroye-sur-Mer (Dakar- Sénégal). Une mise en abîme du discours produit au « Nord » sur le « Sud ». *Revue Asylon(s)*, (3).
- Bouilly, E. (2016). Senegalese mothers 'fight clandestine migration': An intersectional perspective on activism and apathy among parents and spouses left behind. *Review of African Political Economy*, 43(149), 416–435.
- Bouilly, E. (2019) *Du couscous et des meetings contre l'émigration clandestine. Mobiliser sans protester au Sénégal*. Paris: Dalloz.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a theory of practice (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). The logic of practice (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Brinkmann S. (2014). Doing without data. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(6), 720–725.
- Calargé, C. (2015). Clandestine or Conquistadores? Beyond Sensational Headlines, or a Literature of Urgency. *Research in African Literatures*, 46(2), 1–14.
- Callamard, A. (2017). *Unlawful death of refugees and migrants* (United Nations General Assembly Report No. A/72/335).
<https://www.refworld.org/docid/59b923524.html>

- Caminando Fronteras. (2024). *Right to life monitoring: First five months 2024*. <https://caminandofronteras.org/en/monitoreo/right-to-life-monitoring-first-five-months-2024/>
- Campana, P. (2020). Human smuggling: Structure and mechanisms. *Crime and Justice*, 49(1), 471-514.
- Cangià, F., & Zittoun, T. (2020). Exploring the interplay between (im)mobility and imagination. *Culture & Psychology*, 26(4), 707-714.
- Cappiali, T., & Pacciardi, A. (2024). Reorienting EU Border externalisation Studies: A Decolonial Intersectional Approach. *Geopolitics*, 30(1), 300–324.
- Carling, J. (2007). Migration control and migrant fatalities at the Spanish–African borders. *International Migration Review*, 41(2), 316–343.
- Carrera, S. (2007). *The EU border management strategy FRONTEX and the challenges of irregular immigration in the Canary Islands* (CEPS Working Document No. 270). Centre for European Policy Studies.
- Casaglia, A., & Pacciardi, A. (2022). A close look at the EU–Turkey deal: The language of border externalisation. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 40(8), 1659-1676.
- Casas-Cortes, M. (2021). ‘Migration thinking’: Embracing mobility all the way down. *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 11(3), 517–520.
- Casas-Cortes, M., & Cobarrubias, S. (2019). Genealogies of contention in concentric circles: Remote migration control and its Eurocentric geographical imaginaries. *International Journal of Societies, Politics and Cultures*, 1(1), 125–136.
- Casas-Cortes, M., Cobarrubias, S., & Pickles, J. (2011). Stretching borders beyond sovereign territories? Mapping EU and Spain’s border externalisation policies. *Geopolitica(s)*, 2(1), 71–90.
- Casas-Cortes, M., Cobarrubias, S., & Pickles, J. (2015). Riding routes and itinerant borders: Autonomy of migration and border externalisation. *Antipode*, 47(4), 894–914.

- Cassarino, J.-P. (2018). Beyond the criminalisation of migration: A non-western perspective. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 4(4), 397–411.
- CEAR. (2022). *Border externalisation and migration control in Senegal: Risks for development cooperation*.
- CEAR. (2023, August 31). *Posible devolución colectiva a Senegal de 168 personas migrantes rescatadas por el barco español Río Tajo*. <https://www.cear.es/noticias/cear-reclama-paralizar-traslado-a-senegal/>
- Chemlali, A. (2023). A mother's choice: Undocumented motherhood, waiting and smuggling in the Tunisian–Libyan borderlands. *Trends in organisational Crime*, 26(1), 30–47.
- Chemlali, A. (2024). Treading water in transit: Understanding gendered stuckness and movement in Tunisia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 50(20), 5210–5227.
- Chimni, B. S. (2009). The birth of a 'discipline': From refugee to forced migration studies. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22(1), 11–29.
- Chou, M., & Gilbert, M. V. (2017). The EU-Senegal Mobility Partnership: From launch to suspension and negotiation failure. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 8(4), 408–427.
- Clave-Mercier, V., & Wuth, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Decolonising political concepts*. Routledge.
- Cobarrubias, S., Cuttitta, P., Casas-Cortes, M., Lemberg-Pedersen, M., El Qadim, N., İşleyen, B., Fine, S., Giusa, C., & Heller, C. (2023). Interventions on the concept of externalisation in migration and border studies. *Political Geography*, 105, 102911.
- Cobarrubias, S., & Lemberg-Pedersen, M. (2025). Beyond presentism in border externalisation studies: Upcycled spatio-cultural geographies of imperial times. *Geoforum*, 159, 103934.
- Collins, F. L. (2022). Geographies of migration II: Decolonising migration studies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 46(5), 1241–1251.
- Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought*. Unwin Hyman.

- Collinson, S. (1996). Visa requirements, carrier sanctions, “safe third countries” and “readmission”: The development of an asylum “buffer zone” in Europe. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21(1), 76–90.
- Cornwall, A. (2005). Introduction: Perspectives on gender in Africa. In A. Cornwall (Ed.), *Readings in gender in Africa* (pp. 1-19). Indiana University Press.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), Article 8, 139–167.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(1), 17–31.
- Cross, H. (2013). *Migrants, borders and global capitalism: West African labour mobility and EU borders*. Routledge.
- Curiel, O. (2022). Constructing feminist methodologies from the perspective of decolonial feminism. In Y. Espinosa M., M. Lugones, & N. Maldonado-Torres (Eds.), *Decolonial feminism in Abya Yala: Caribbean, Meso, and South American contributions and challenges* (pp. 43-60). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cuttitta, P. (2020a). Non-governmental/Civil society organisations and the European Union-externalisation of migration management in Tunisia and Egypt. *Population, Space and Place*, 26(7), e2329.
- Cuttitta, P. (2020). Rethinking externalisation: For a critique of Euro-centrism and state-centrism in migration and border studies. *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, CXXVII(4), 55–74.
- Cuttitta, P. (2022). Over land and sea: NGOs/CSOs and EU border externalisation along the central Mediterranean route. *Geopolitics*, 29(1), 294-320.
- D’Onofrio, A., & Sjöberg, J. (2020). Moving global horizons: Imagining selfhood, mobility and futurities through creative practice in ethnographic research. *Culture & Psychology*, 26(4), 732-748.

- Dahinden, J. (2016). A plea for the ‘de-migranticization’ of research on migration and integration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(13), 2207–2225.
- Daley, P. 2021. “2 – Reclaiming Mobility: A Pan-Africanist Approach to Migration.” CODESRIA Bulletin 2&3:17.
- De Genova, N. P. (2013). Spectacles of migrant ‘illegality’: The scene of exclusion, the obscene of inclusion. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(7), 1180–1198.
- De Genova, N. (2013a). ‘We are of the connections’: migration, methodological nationalism, and ‘militant research.’ *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 250–258.
- De Genova, N. P. (2018). The “migrant crisis” as racial crisis: Do Black lives matter in Europe? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 41(10), 1765-1782.
- De Genova, N. P. (2018a). Afterword. Deportation: The last word? In S. Khosravi (Ed.), *After deportation: Ethnographic perspectives* (pp. 145–152). Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Genova, N., S. Mezzadra, and J. Pickles, eds (2015). “New Keywords: Migration and Borders,” *Cultural Studies* 29:1.
- Degli Umberti, S., & Riccio, B. (2017). Imagining greener pastures? Shifting perceptions of Europe and mobility in Senegalese society. *Etnografia e ricerca qualitativa*, 10(3), 339-362.
- Deshingkar, P., & Gueye, D. (2022). *Irregular migration in Senegal: Faith, dreams and human smuggling through the desert and sea* (Migrating out of Poverty Working Paper No. 67). University of Sussex.
- Dia, H. (2009). *Espaces domestiques, espaces villageois, espaces urbains multi-situés : Cinquante ans de migrations à partir de la moyenne vallée du fleuve Sénégal, 1960-2010* [Doctoral dissertation, Université Paris Descartes].
- Diagne, S. (2013). *Tontines et empowerment des femmes au Sénégal: le cas des tontinières du marché des Habitations à Loyer Modéré (hlm) Nimzatt à Dakar* [Master's thesis, Université Laval].

- Dianka, D. (2015). Migrations féminines et évolution du rapport de genre en milieu sénégalais. *Canadian Journal of Tropical Geography / Revue Canadienne de Géographie Tropicale*, 3(2), 15-25.
- Diop, A. B. (2012). *La famille Wolof*. Karthala.
- Diop, C. A. (1963). *The cultural unity of Black Africa*. Karnak House.
- Diop, M. C. (Ed.). (2008). *Le Sénégal des migrations: Mobilités, identités et sociétés*. Karthala.
- ECRE. (2022, November 18). *Spain: Government sticks to script on Melilla Massacre in face of mounting evidence disputing it – MPs call for Marlaska to resign, Spain and Morocco continue strengthening relations*. <https://ecre.org/spain-government-sticks-to-script-on-melilla-massacre-in-face-of-mounting-evidence-disputing-it-mps-call-for-marlaska-to-resign-spain-and-morocco-continue-strengthening-relations/>
- ECRE. (2023, April 2023). *Spain: Overview of the main changes since the previous report update*. Asylum Information Database (AIDA). <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/spain/overview-main-changes-previous-report-update/>
- EEAS. (2022, October 10). *European Diplomatic Academy: Opening remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the inauguration of the pilot programme*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-diplomatic-academy-opening-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-inauguration-pilot_en
- El Qadim, N. (2014). Postcolonial challenges to migration control: French–Moroccan cooperation practices on forced returns. *Security Dialogue*, 45(3), 242–261.
- El Qadim, N. (2018). The symbolic meaning of international mobility: EU–Morocco negotiations on visa facilitation. *Migration Studies*, 6(2), 279–305.
- ElDiario.es. (2019, December 15). El matriarcado secreto de la migración: “El viaje a Europa es una alianza entre madre e hijo”. https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/migracion-proyecto-familiar-sociedad-poligama_1_1704656.html

- ElDiario.es. (2023, August 26). La Guardia Civil devuelve a Senegal a los 168 migrantes rescatados, tras la negativa de Mauritania a desembarcar. https://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/guardia-civil-devuelve-senegal-168-migrantes-rescatados-negativa-mauritania-desembarcar_1_10474513.html
- Ernste, H., K. Martens, and J. Schapendonk. (2012). “The Design, Experience and Justice of Mobility.” *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie* 103: 509–515.
- EU Parliament Report. (2024). *REPORT on a European Parliament recommendation to the Commission concerning on the ongoing negotiations on a status agreement on operational activities carried out by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) in Senegal* (A-9-2024-0032). https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2024-0032_EN.html
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). Grove Press. (Original work published 1961)
- Fatou Kane, N. (2018). *Vous avez dit féministe ? Suivi de (In)certitudes*. L’Harmattan.
- Foley, D. E. (2002). Critical ethnography: The reflexive turn. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(4), 469–490.
- Fouquet, T. (2008). Migrations et “glocalisation” dakaroises. In M.-C. Diop (Ed.), *Le Sénégal des migrations: Mobilités, identités et sociétés* (pp. 241–276). Karthala.
- Freedman, J., Latouche, A., Miranda, A., Sahraoui, N., Santana de Andrade, G., & Tyszler, E. (Eds.). (2023). *The gender of borders: Embodied narratives of migration, violence, and agency*. Routledge.
- Frontex. (2015). *Africa-Frontex Intelligence Community Joint Report*. <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2015/dec/eu-frontex-afic-report-2015.pdf>
- Frontex. (2019, July 15). *Frontex opens Risk Analysis Cell in Senegal*. <https://www.frontex.europa.eu/media-centre/news/news-release/frontex-opens-risk-analysis-cell-in-senegal-6nkN3B>

- Frowd, P (2018) *Security at the Borders: Transnational Practices and Technologies in West Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gaibazzi, P. (2024). Indirect migration management: Entangled histories of (externalised) repatriation in and beyond the Gambia's colonial legacy. *Geoforum*, 155, 103910.
- Gammeltoft-Hansen, T., & Nyberg-Sørensen, N. (Eds.). (2013). *The migration industry and the commercialization of international migration*. Routledge.
- Gani, J. K., & Khan, R. M. (2024). Positionality statements as a function of coloniality: Interrogating reflexive methodologies. *International Studies Quarterly*, 68(2), sqae038.
- Garelli, G., & Tazzioli, M. (2013). Challenging the discipline of migration: Militant research in migration studies, an introduction. *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 245-249.
- Garnaoui, W. (2022). *Harraga: Bruciare per l'Europa: Indagine e psicoanalisi dei migranti nel Mediterraneo. Per un pensiero decolonizzato delle frontiere*. Poesis Editrice.
- Gazzotti, L (2021) *Immigration nation. Aid, control, and border politics in Morocco*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gazzotti, L. (2021a). (Un)making illegality: Border control, racialised bodies and differential regimes of illegality in Morocco. *The Sociological Review*, 69(2), 277–295.
- Geertz, C. (1986). Making experience, authoring selves. In V. W. Turner & E. M. Bruner (Eds.), *The anthropology of experience* (pp. 373-380). University of Illinois Press.
- Geiger, M., & Pécoud, A. (Eds.). (2010). *The politics of international migration management*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gerth-Niculescu, M., & Simoncelli, M. (2024, January 20). Senegal's gold rush: More wealth, but at what cost? *DW*.

<https://www.dw.com/en/senegals-gold-rush-more-wealth-but-at-what-cost/a-68007546>

- Gilmartin, M., & Kuusisto-Arponen, A. K. (2019). Borders and bodies: Citing critical geographies of migration. In K. Mitchell, R. Jones, & J. L. Fluri (Eds.), *Handbook on critical geographies of migration* (pp. 18-29). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Giuffré, M., Denaro, C., & Raach, F. (2022). On ‘Safety’ and EU externalisation of Borders:: Questioning the Role of Tunisia as a “Safe Country of Origin” and a “Safe Third Country”. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 24(4), 570-599.
- Goldstone, Z. (2024). Migration as reparation for colonialism. *Res Publica*, 30, 763–781.
- Gouvernement du Sénégal. (2023, July 27). *Validation de la Stratégie Nationale de Lutte contre la Migration Irrégulière (SNLMI) - Jeudi 27 juillet 2023 : Allocution de Monsieur Amadou BA, Premier ministre*. Primature du Sénégal.
<https://primature.sn/publications/actualites/validation-de-la-strategie-nationale-de-lutte-contre-la-migration>
- Gray, J., & Dagg, J. (2019). Using reflexive lifelines in biographical interviews to aid the collection, visualisation and analysis of resilience. *Contemporary Social Science*, 14(3-4), 407-422.
- Gross-Wyrzten, L., & El Yacoubi, Z. (2022). Externalizing otherness: The racialization of belonging in the Morocco-EU border. *Geoforum*, 135, 103673.
- Gueye, C., Fall, A. S., & Tall, S. M. (2007). Climatic perturbation and urbanization in Senegal. *The Geographical Journal*, 173(1), 88–92.
- Gündoğdu, A. (2022). Border deaths as forced disappearances: Frantz Fanon and the outlines of a critical phenomenology. *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology*, 5(1), 12-41.
- Gutierrez Rodríguez, E. (2018). The coloniality of migration and the ‘refugee crisis’: On the asylum-migration nexus, the transatlantic white European settler colonialism migration and racial capitalism. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 34(1), 16-28.

- Gyan Addo, L., Standke-Erdmann, M., & Stachowitsch, S. (2020). *The Women, Peace and Security Agenda in EU border management* (Working Paper Oiip 110/221). Austrian Institute for International Affairs.
- Hagen, J., Michelis, I., Eggert, J. P., & Turner, L. (2023). Learning to say ‘no’: Privilege, entitlement and refusal in peace, (post)conflict and security research. *Critical Studies on Security*, 11(2), 126–144.
- Hahn, H. P. and G. Klute (eds) (2007) *Cultures of Migration: African perspectives*. Münster: LIT Verlag.
- Häkli, J., & Kallio, K. P. (2020). Bodies and persons: The politics of embodied encounters in asylum seeking. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(4), 682–703.
- Hann, M. (2020). The dream to leave: Imagining migration and mobility through sport in Senegal. In N. Besnier, D. G. Calabrò, & D. Guinness (Eds.), *Sport, migration, and gender in the neoliberal age* (pp. 220–239). Routledge.
- Harcourt, W., van den Berg, K., Dupuis, C., & Gaybor, J. (Eds.). (2023). *Feminist methodologies: Experiments, collaborations and reflections*. Springer.
- Harding, S. (1982). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is ‘strong objectivity’? *The Centennial Review*, 36(3), 437–470.
- Harding, S. (2006). *Science and social inequality: Feminist and postcolonial issues*. University of Illinois Press.
- Haslanger, S. (2018). What is a social practice? *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, 82, 231–247.
- Heller, C., & Pécoud, A. (2018). *Counting migrants’ deaths at the border: From civil society counter-statistics to (inter)governmental recuperation* (IMI Working Papers series 144). International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.
- Hernández-Carretero, M., & Carling, J. (2012). Beyond “Kamikaze Migrants”: Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe. *Human organisation*, 71(4), 407–416.

- Hesse-Biber, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Feminist research practice: A primer*. SAGE.
- Hinger, B. (2021). Towards an expanded approach to black mobilities. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45(1), 24-43.
- hooks, b. (1992). *Black looks: Race and representation*. South End Press.
- Horst, C. (2006). *Transnational nomads: How Somalis cope with refugee life in the Dadaab camps of Kenya*. Berghahn Books.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021, December 8). *Airborne complicity: Frontex aerial surveillance enables abuse*. <https://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2022/12/08/airborne-complicity-frontex-aerial-surveillance-enables-abuse>
- Hyndman, J. (2004). Mind the gap: Bridging feminist and political geography through geopolitics. *Political Geography*, 23(3), 241–366.
- Hyndman, J. (2007). Feminist geopolitics revisited: Body counts in Iraq. *The Professional Geographer*, 59(1), 35–46.
- Hyndman, J., & Mountz, A. (2008). Another Brick in the Wall? Neo-Refolement and the externalisation of Asylum by Australia and Europe. *Government and Opposition*, 43(2), 249–269.
- Imam, A., Mama, A., & Sow, F. (Eds.). (2004). *Sexe, genre et société: Engendrer les sciences sociales africaines*. Codesria-Karthala.
- Infomigrants. (2024, February 1). *Crackdown on Senegalese claiming asylum at Spanish airports*. <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/54769/crackdown-on-senegalese-claiming-asylum-at-spanish-airports>
- IOM. (2019, August 29). *IOM, partners begin construction of new border posts in Senegal*. <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-partners-begin-construction-new-border-posts-senegal>
- IOM. (2022, October 28). *IOM supports construction of new Gambian-Senegalese border post*. <https://rodakar.iom.int/news/iom-supports-construction-new-gambian-senegalese-border-post>
- Jegen, L. F. (2020). *The political economy of migration governance in Senegal*. Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute (ABI).

- Jegen, L. F. (2023). Migratising' mobility: Coloniality of knowledge and externally funded migration capacity building projects in Niger. *Geoforum*, 146, 103851.
- Jegen, L. F. (2025) "Protecting" Rights of Smuggled Migrants in the Context of State-Enforced Immobility: Legal Borderwork in Senegal. *International Political Sociology*. 19(2): 1-19.
- Jiménez-Alvarez, M. G., Espiñeira, K., & Gazzotti, L. (2020). Migration policy and international human rights frameworks in Morocco: tensions and contradictions. *The Journal of North African Studies*, 26(5), 893–911.
- Kane, A. (2002). Financial arrangements across borders: Women's predominant participation in popular finance, from Thilogne and Dakar to Paris. A Senegalese case study. In G. Campbell, B. Lemire, & R. Pearson (Eds.), *Women and credit: Researching the past, refiguring the future*. Routledge.
- Karlsson-Franck, A. (2022). Laughable borders: Making the case for the humorous in migration studies. *Migration Politics*, 1(1), 004.
- Khan, M. (2019). *The Gambia-Senegal border: Issues in regional integration*. Routledge.
- Khosravi, S. (Ed.). (2018). *After deportation: Ethnographic perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Khosravi, S. (2021). Afterword: Waiting, a state of consciousness. In C. M. Jacobsen, M.-A. Karlsen, & S. Khosravi (Eds.), *Waiting and the temporalities of irregular migration* (pp. 202–207). Routledge.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2005). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 303–342). Sage Publications.
- Korvensyrjä, A. (2017). The Valletta process and the Westphalian imaginary of migration research. *Movements*, 3(1), 191–204.

- Korvensyrjä, A. (2025). The ‘borders of Berlin’: West African protests and the coloniality of Euro-African deportation cooperation. *Geoforum*, 161, 104002.
- Lagrange, P. (2017). L’appréhension du phénomène migratoire par le droit international. *Revue critique de droit international privé*, 106(1), 27-35.
- Landau, L. B., & Palmary, I. (2016). Legacies, linkages and limits: Teaching migration studies in a South African university. *Migration Studies*, 4(2), 276–280.
- Laube, L. (2019). The relational dimension of externalizing border control: Selective visa policies in migration and border diplomacy. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7, Article 29.
- Lavenex, Sandra and Emek M. UçArer. 2004. “The External Dimension of Europeanization”. *Cooperation and Conflict* 39 (4): 417–43.
- Lavenex, S. (2008). A governance perspective on the European Neighbourhood Policy: Integration beyond conditionality? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15(6), 938–955.
- Lavenex, S. (2016). Multilevelling EU external governance: the role of international organisations in the diffusion of EU migration policies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(4), 554–570.
- Le Monde. (2023, February 23). Tunisia's President Saied claims sub-Saharan migrants threaten country's identity. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2023/02/23/in-tunisia-president-kais-saied-claims-sub-saharan-migrants-threaten-country-s-identity_6016898_124.html
- Lemberg-Pedersen, M. (2018). Manufacturing displacement: externalisation and postcoloniality in European migration control. *Global Affairs*, 5(3), 247–271.
- Lemberg-Pedersen, M., Fett, S., Mayblin, L., Sharaoui, N., & Stambol, E. M. (Eds.). (2022). *Postcoloniality and forced migration*. Bristol University Press.
- Lighthouse Reports. (2024). *Desert dumps*. <https://www.lighthousereports.com/investigation/desert-dumps/>

- Lindberg, A. (2024). Researching border violence in an indefensible Europe. *Geopolitics*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2321158>
- Lugones, M. (2008). The coloniality of gender. *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, 2, 1–17.
- Lugones, M. (2010). Toward a decolonial feminism. *Hypatia*, 25(4), 742–759.
- Magallanes-Gonzalez, C. (2020). Sub-Saharan Leaders in Morocco's Migration Industry: Activism, Integration, and Smuggling. *Journal of North African Studies*.
- Maher, S. (2018). Out of West Africa: Human Smuggling as a Social Enterprise. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 676(1), 36–56.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *The politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.
- Makaremi, C. (2008). Participer en observant. Étudier et assister les étrangers aux frontières. In D. Fassin & A. Bensa (Eds.), *Les politiques de l'enquête: Épreuves ethnographiques* (pp. 283–304). La Découverte.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2007). On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 240–270.
- Maldonado-Torres, N. (2016). *Outline of ten theses on coloniality and decoloniality*. Frantz Fanon Foundation. <https://fondation-frantzfanon.com/outline-of-ten-theses-on-coloniality->
- Manning, J. (2022). A decolonial feminist ethnography: Empowerment, ethics and epistemology. In *Empowering methodologies in organisational and social research* (pp. 39–54). Routledge.
- Martins, B. O. (2023). Security knowledges: circulation, control, and responsible research and innovation in EU border management. *Science as Culture*, 32(3), 435–459.
- Marino, R. (2023). *Re-making it here : Returnees and non-state actors in the (European) externalisation of return migration management in The*

Gambia [Doctoral dissertation, Ghent University]. Ghent University Library.

Mayblin, L., & Turner, J. (2020). *Migration studies and colonialism*. Polity Press.

Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the postcolony*. University of California Press.

Mbembe, A. (2021). *Out of the dark night: Essays on decolonisation*. Columbia University Press.

Mbodj, M. (1993) 'The state of the groundnut economy: a 30-year crisis' in M. C. Diop (ed.), *Senegal: essays in statecraft*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Mbodji, M. (2008). Imaginaires et migrations: Le cas du Sénégal. In M.-C. Diop (Ed.), *Le Sénégal des migrations: Mobilités, identités et sociétés* (pp. 305–319). Karthala.

Melly, C. M. (2011). Titanic tales of missing men: Reconfigurations of national identity and gendered presence in Dakar, Senegal. *American Ethnologist*, 38(2), 361–376.

Ménard, A., & Bedert, M. (2021). Introduction: The role of social imagination in strategies of im/mobility in Sierra Leone and Liberia. *African Diaspora*, 13(1-2), 1–20.

Mendy, A. (1992). *Goorgoorlou Serigne Maramokho Guissané*. Sogedit.

Mezzadra, S. (2010). The gaze of autonomy: Capitalism, migration, and social struggles. In V. Squire (Ed.), *The contested politics of mobility: Border-zones and irregularity* (pp. 121–142). Routledge.

Michael, M. (2012). Anecdote. In C. Lury & N. Wakeford (Eds.), *Inventive methods: The happening of the social* (pp. 25–35). Routledge.

Mignolo, W. D. (2007). Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 449–514.

Mills, C. W. (2019). Race and global justice. In D. Bell (Ed.), *Empire, race and global justice* (pp. 94–120). Cambridge University Press.

- Mohanty, C. T. (1998). Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review*, 30(1), 61–88.
- Moran, M. H. (2012). Our mothers have spoken: Synthesizing old and new forms of women’s political authority in Liberia. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 13(4), 51–66.
- Mountz, A. (2004). Embodying the nation state: Canada response to human smuggling. *Political Geography*, 23(3), 323–245.
- Mountz, A. (2018). Political geography III: Migration, austerity, and the production of rebellious bodies. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(6), 818-828.
- Mourre, M. (2018). African colonial soldiers, memories and imagining migration in Senegal in the twenty-first century. *Africa*, 88(3), 518-538.
- Mouthaan, M. (2019). Unpacking domestic preferences in the policy-‘receiving’ state: the EU’s migration cooperation with Senegal and Ghana. *CMS* 7, 35.
- Moyo, I. (2022). The complex asymmetrical power relations in European Union border externalisation in Africa. In M. Inocent & S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (Eds.), *The paradox of planetary human entanglements: Challenges of living together* (pp. 70-81). Routledge.
- Nagar, R., & Geiger, S. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and identity in feminist fieldwork revisited. In A. Tickell, E. Sheppard, J. Peck, & T. Barnes (Eds.), *Politics and practice in economic geography* (pp. 267–278). Sage.
- Ndiaye, L. (2009). *Parenté et mort chez les Wolof: Tradition et modernité au Sénégal*. L’Harmattan.
- Ndiaye, M. (2020, November 5). Les non-dits du discours de Touba sur l’immigration clandestine. *Senepplus*.
<https://www.seneplus.com/opinions/les-non-dits-du-discours-de-touba-sur-limmigration-clandestine>
- Ndione, B. (2018). *Migration profile Senegal*. ANSD and IOM.

- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2013). *Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa: Myths of decolonisation*. CODESRIA.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2018). The dynamics of epistemological decolonisation in the 21st century: Towards epistemic freedom. *Strategic Review for Southern Africa*, 40(1), 16-45.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. (2019). Provisional notes on decolonizing research methodology and undoing its dirty history. *Journal of Developing Societies*, 35(4), 481-492.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J., & Ngqulunga, B. (2022). Introduction: From the idea of Africa to the African idea of Africa. *The Thinker*, 93(4), 6–9.
- Nevins, J. (2019). Migration as reparations. In R. Jones (Ed.), *Open borders: In defense of free movement* (pp. 129–140). University of Georgia Press.
- Ngom, A. (2017). Tekki" ou le mirage de la réussite chez les jeunes de Casamance. *Revue Africaine des Migrations Internationales*, (3), 2-24.
- Ngom, A. (2018). Les damnés de la mer: Les candidats à la migration au départ de la Casamance. *Journal des Anthropologues*, (154-155), 285-304.
- Ngom, A. (2021). The organisation of trips in emigration by pirogue in Senegal. *African Review of Migration and Environment*, 5(1), 28-40.
- Nhemachane, A., Mlambo, N., & Kaundjua, M. (2016). The notion of the 'field' and the practices of researching and writing Africa: Towards decolonial praxis. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 9(7), 15–36.
- Niane, D. T. (1998). *Histoire des Mandingues de l'Ouest*. KARTHALA Éditions.
- Nyamnjoh, H. M. (2016). "Penetrating the unseen": Role of religion and spiritual practices in the Senegalese boat migration process. In A. Adogame (Ed.), *The public face of African new religious movements in diaspora: Imagining the religious 'other'* (pp. 125-146). Routledge.

- Nzegwu, N. (Ed.). (2011). *Gender epistemologies in Africa: Gendering traditions, spaces, social institutions, and identities*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oudenhuijsen, L. (2021). Quietly queer(ing): The normative value of sutura and its potential for young women in urban Senegal. *Africa*, 91(3), 434-452.
- Ould Moctar, H. (2020). The proximity of the past in Mauritania: EU border externalisation and its colonial antecedents. *Anthropologie & Développement*, 51, 69-91.
- Ould Moctar, H. (2024). *After border externalisation: Migration, race and labour in Mauritania*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Oyèwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Pacciardi, A. (2024). A European narrative of border externalisation: The European Trust Fund for Africa story. *European Security*.
- Pacciardi, A. (forthcoming). Coloniality of gender in border externalisation: Performing masculinities and femininities at the Euro-Senegalese borderlands. In J. Freedman, N. Sahraoui, & E. Tyszler (Eds.), *Articulating post/decolonial and intersectional approaches to migration*. Bristol University Press.
- Pacciardi, A., & Berndtsson, J. (2022). EU border externalisation and security outsourcing: Exploring the migration industry in Libya. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(17), 4010-4028.
- Pacciardi, A., & Casaglia, A. (2021). Il nesso sicurezza-sviluppo nella gestione migratoria europea in nord Africa. In *Oltre la globalizzazione: Feedback* (pp. 743-751). Società di Studi Geografici.
- Pallister-Wilkins, P. (2022). *Humanitarian borders: Unequal mobility and saving lives*. Verso.
- Paoletti, E. (2010). *The migration of power and North-South inequalities: The case of Italy and Libya*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Popoviciu, A. (2023, March 20). How Europe outsourced border enforcement to Africa. *In These Times*. <https://inthesetimes.com/article/europe-militarize-africa-senegal-borders-anti-migration-surveillance>
- Prasch, A. M. (2015). Maternal bodies in militant protest: Leymah Gbowee and the rhetorical agency of African motherhood. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 38(2), 187–205.
- Prieto-Flores, Ò. (2025). Necropolitics at the Southern European Border: Deaths and missing migrants on the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*, 10(1), 111–127.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), 533–580.
- ReliefWeb. (2019, July 5). *IOM supports cross-border communities between Mauritania and Mali*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/mauritania/iom-supports-cross-border-communities-between-mauritania-and-mali>
- Reslow, N. (2012). The role of third countries in EU migration policy: The mobility partnerships. *European Journal of Migration and Law*, 14(4), 393–415.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Sage Publications.
- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.
- Richter, L. (2019). Doing bizness: Migrant smuggling and everyday life in the Maghreb. *Focaal* (85):26–36.
- Richter, L. (2021). Moral Borderwork: Policies, Policing, and Practices of Migrant Smuggling at the EU-Morocco Border. *Geopolitics*, 27(5), 1430–1449.
- Rodriguez, A.-L. (2015). Three stories about living without migration in Dakar: Coming to terms with the contradictions of the moral economy. *Africa*, 85(2), 333–355.
- Rodriguez, A.L. (2017). European attempts to govern African youths by raising awareness of the risks of migration: Ethnography of an encounter. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8), 1314–1329.

- Rodriguez, A. L. (2023). Endurance Lost and Found: Unwanted Return and the Suspension of Time. *Geopolitics*, 29(4), 1380–1399.
- Russo, A. (2018). *Feminist accountability: Disrupting violence and transforming institutions*. New York University Press.
- Rygiel, K. (2010). Governing border zones of mobility through e-borders: The politics of embodied mobility. In V. Squire (Ed.), *The contested politics of mobility: Border-zones and irregularity* (pp. 143–168). Routledge.
- Sachseder, J., Stachowitsch, S., & Binder, C. (2022). Gender, race, and crisis-driven institutional growth: Discourses of ‘migration crisis’ and the expansion of Frontex. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(19), 4670–4693.
- Sager, A. (2018). *Toward a cosmopolitan ethics of mobility: The migrant’s-eye view of the world*. Springer.
- Sakho, P., & Dial, F. B. (2010). *Migration clandestine féminine: Étude de cas de Dakar et sa banlieue* (CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2010/56). European University Institute.
- Salazar, N. B. (2020). On imagination and imaginaries, mobility and immobility: Seeing the forest for the trees. *Culture & Psychology*, 26(4), 768–777.
- Sanchez, G. (2016) *Human Smuggling and Border Crossings*. Routledge
- Sarr, F. (2016). *Afrotopia*. Philippe Rey.
- Savio Vammen, I. M., Cold-Ravnkilde, S., & Lucht, H. (2021). Borderwork in the expanded EU-African borderlands. *Geopolitics*, 27(5), 1317–1330.
- Savio Vammen, I. M. (2024). The Struggle Over Mobility Narratives: How Senegalese Activists use Alternative Information Campaigns to Contest EU externalisation. *International Migration Review*, 0(0).
- Schapendonk, J. and Van Moppes, D (2007) *Migration and Information: Images of Europe, migration encouraging factors and en route information sharing*. Working Papers Migration and Development Series. Nijmegen: Radboud University Nijmegen.

- Schapendonk, J., & Steel, G. (2014). Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 104(2), 262–270.
- Schapendonk, J. (2020). Finding Ways Through Eurospace: West African Movers Re-viewing Europe from the Inside (1st ed., Vol. 7). Berghahn Books.
- Schapendonk, J. (2021) Counter moves. Destabilizing the grand narrative of onward migration and secondary movements in Europe. *International Migration*, 59, 45–58.
- Schapendonk, J., van Liempt, I., Schwarz, I., & Steel, G. (2018). Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes. *Geoforum*, 106, 211–216.
- Scheel, S. (2013). Studying embodied encounters: Autonomy of migration beyond its romanticization. *Postcolonial Studies*, 16(3), 279–288.
- Scheel, S., & Tazzioli, M. (2022). Who is a migrant? Abandoning the nation-state point of view in the study of migration. *Migration Politics*, 1(1), 002.
- Schmoll, C. (2020). *Les damnées de la mer: Femmes et frontières en Méditerranée*. La Découverte.
- Schuster, L., & Majidi, N. (2013). What happens post-deportation? The experience of deported Afghans. *Migration Studies*, 1(2), 221–240.
- Schuster, L., & Majidi, N. (2015). Deportation stigma and re-migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41(4), 635–652.
- Seck, F. (2018). Goorgoorlou, the neoliberal homo senegalensis: Comics and economics in postcolonial Senegal. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 30(3), 263–278.
- Semley, L. (2013). Public motherhood in West Africa as theory and practice. In D. R. Gabaccia & M. J. Maynes (Eds.), *Gender history across epistemologies* (pp. 103–120). Wiley-Blackwell.

- Seneplus. (2024, July 16). *Sonko défend sa vision d'une Afrique portée par sa jeunesse*. <https://www.seneplus.com/politique/sonko-defend-sa-vision-dune-afrique-portee-par-sa-jeunesse>
- Shaidrova, M. (2023). Performing a 'returnee' in Benin City, Nigeria. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 24(Suppl 2), S503–S520.
- Sahraoui, N. (2020). Gendering the care/control nexus of the humanitarian border: Women's bodies and gendered control of mobility in a EUropean borderland. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 38(5), 905–922.
- Sheller, M. (2018). *Mobility justice: The politics of movement in an age of anxiety*. Verso.
- Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 38(2), 207–226.
- Sium, A., & Ritskes, E. (2013). Speaking truth to power: Indigenous storytelling as an act of living resistance. *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2(1), I–X.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.
- Somers, M. R. (1994). The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach. *Theory and Society*, 23(5), 605–649.
- Souiah, F. (2019). Corps absents : Des fils disparus et des familles en lutte ? Le cas des migrants tunisiens. *Critique Internationale*, 83(2), 87–100.
- Sow, F. (Ed.). (2009). *La recherche féministe francophone*. Karthala.
- Spijkerboer, T. (2022). Migration management clientelism. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48(12), 2892–2907.
- Spivak, G. C. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present*. Harvard University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (2010). Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea. In R. C. Morris (Ed.), *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea* (pp. 21–78). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1988)

- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Squire, C., Davis, M., Esin, C., Andrews, M., Harrison, B., Hydén, L.-C., & Hydén, M. (2014). *What is narrative research?* London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Stachowitsch, S., & Sachseder, J. (2019). The gendered and racialised politics of risk analysis: The case of Frontex. *Critical Studies on Security*, 7(2), 107–123.
- Stambol, E. M., & Jegen, L. F. (2022). Colonial continuities and the commodification of mobility policing: French Civipol in West Africa. In M. Lemberg Pedersen, S. Fett, L. Mayblin, N. Sharaoui, & E. M. Stambol (Eds.), *Postcoloniality and forced migration* (pp. 76–92). Bristol University Press.
- Statewatch. (2020, December 15). *Senegal: French and Spanish officers deployed to check documents at Dakar airport*.
<https://www.statewatch.org/news/2020/december/senegal-french-and-spanish-officers-deployed-to-check-documents-at-dakar-airport/>
- Statewatch. (2023, July 19). *Externalisation of migration control: From the 1990s to the present*.
<https://www.statewatch.org/analyses/2023/externalisation-of-migration-control-from-the-1990s-to-the-present/>
- Stierl, M. (2016). Contestations in death: The role of grief in migration struggles. *Citizenship Studies*, 20(2), 173–191.
- Stierl, M. (2019). *Migrant resistance in contemporary Europe*. Routledge.
- Stierl, M. (2022). Do no harm? The impact of policy on migration scholarship. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 40(5), 1083–1102.
- Stock, I. (2012). Gender and the dynamics of mobility: Reflections on African migrant mothers and ‘transit migration’ in Morocco. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(9), 1577–1595.
- Stock, I., Üstübeci, A., & Schultz, S. (2019). externalisation at work: Responses to migration policies from the Global South. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7, Article 48.

- Sylla, A., & Schultz, S. U. (2020). Commemorating the deadly other side of externalised borders through ‘migrant-martyrs’, sacrifices and politicizations of (irregular) migration on the International Migrants’ Day in Mali. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 8, Article 4.
- Taddele Maru, M. (2024). Rejected: The impact of visa bias on Africa–Europe relations. *Henley Global Mobility Report 2024 July*. Henley & Partners. <https://www.henleyglobal.com/publications/global-mobility-report/2024-july/rejected-impact-visa-bias-africaeurope-relations>
- Táíwò, O. O. (2022a). *Against decolonisation: Taking African agency seriously*. C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.
- Táíwò, O. O. (2022b). *Reconsidering reparations*. Oxford University Press.
- Tall, S. M. (2008). La migration internationale sénégalaise : Des recrutements de main-d’œuvre aux pirogues. In M.-C. Diop (Ed.), *Le Sénégal des migrations: Mobilités, identités et sociétés* (pp. 37–67). Karthala.
- Tall, S. M., & Tandian, A. (2010). *Entre regroupement familial et migrations autonomes des femmes Sénégalaises. Quelle analyse de genre des migrations sénégalaises?* (CARIM Notes d’analyse et de synthèse series No. 69). European University Institute.
- Tall, S. M., & Tandian, A. (2011). *Cadre général de la migration internationale sénégalaise: Historicité, actualité et prospective* (CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Note 2011/54). Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.
- Tamale, S. (2020). *Decolonisation and Afrofeminism*. Daraja Press.
- Tazzioli, M. (2019). *The making of migration: The biopolitics of mobility at Europe’s borders*. Sage.
- Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing methodologies in qualitative research: Creating spaces for transformative praxis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20.
- Thiam, A. (1978). *La parole aux négresses*. Denoël/Gonthier.

- Tilley, H. (2011). *Africa as a living laboratory: Empire, development, and the problem of scientific knowledge, 1870-1950*. University of Chicago Press.
- Timera, M. (2001). Les migrations des jeunes Sahéliens : Affirmation de soi et émancipation. *Autrepart*, 18, 37-49.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30(3), 167-186.
- Triandafyllidou, A. (2022). Decentering the study of migration governance: A radical view. *Geopolitics*, 27(3), 811–825.
- Triandafyllidou, A., & Maroukis, T. (2012). *Migrant smuggling: Irregular migration from Asia and Africa to Europe*. Springer.
- Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). *Silencing the past: Power and the production of history*. Beacon Press.
- Tsing, A. L. (2005). *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press.
- Tudor, A. (2018). Cross-fadings of racialisation and migratisation: The postcolonial turn in Western European gender and migration studies. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(7), 1057–1072.
- Tyszler, E. (2019). From controlling mobilities to control over women's bodies: Gendered effects of EU border externalisation in Morocco. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 7, 25.
- Tyszler, E. (2023). Between violence and power to act: Migrant women's resistance at the Morocco–Spain border. In J. Freedman, A. Latouche, A. Miranda, N. Sahraoui, G. Santana de Andrade, & E. Tyszler (Eds.), *The gender of borders: Embodied narratives of migration, violence and agency* (pp. 87–102). Routledge.
- UN Women. (2021). *The gendered impacts of migration in Niger*. <https://interactive.unwomen.org/africa/niger/en/index.html>

- Uwazuruike, A. (2023). Migration and the right to survival: An empirical study of three fishing communities in Senegal. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 99, 71-78.
- Vanyoro, K. (2024). Chronopolitics: Decolonising African Migration Studies. *Critical African Studies*, 16(3), 399-414.
- Van Houtum, H. (2010). Human blacklisting: The global apartheid of the EU's external border regime. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(6), 957-976.
- Verdery, K. (1999). *The political lives of dead bodies: Reburial and postsocialist change*. Columbia University Press.
- Vergès, F. (2017). *A decolonial feminism*. Pluto Press.
- Vives, L. (2017). The European Union–West African Sea Border: Anti-immigration Strategies and Territoriality. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 24(2), 209-224.
- wa Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonizing the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.
- Walia, H. (2013). *Undoing border imperialism*. AK Press.
- Wedeen, L. 2009. Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Welander, M. (2021). The politics of exhaustion and the externalisation of British border control: An articulation of a strategy designed to deter, control and exclude. *International Migration*, 59(6), 29-46.
- Willems, R. (2008). 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* (pp. 277-303). Karthala.
- Willems, R. (2013). Local realities and global possibilities: Deconstructing the imaginations of aspiring migrants in Senegal. *Identities*, 21(3), 320-335.
- Wilson, H. F. (2017). On geography and encounter: Bodies, borders, and difference. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41(4), 451-471.

- Wolff, S. (2014). The politics of negotiating EU readmission agreements: Insights from Morocco and Turkey. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 16(1), 69–95.
- Womersley, G. (2020). (Un)imagination and (im)mobility: Exploring the past and constructing possible futures among refugee victims of torture in Greece. *Culture & Psychology*, 26(4), 749–767.
- Wynter, S. (2003). Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after Man, its overrepresentation—An argument. *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(3), 257–337.
- Yates, C., & Bolter, J. (2021). *African migration through the Americas: Drivers, routes, and policy responses*. Migration Policy Institute.
- Young, I. M. (2006). Responsibility and global justice: A social connection model. *Social Philosophy and Policy*, 23(1), 102–130.
- Zanker, F. (2019). Managing or restricting movement? Diverging approaches of African and European migration governance. *CMS* 7, 17.
- Zanker, F. (2023) “When There Is No Migration, the Whole Region Has a Problem”: The Political Priorities of Migration Policies in West Africa. *AHMR African Human Mobility Review* 10(2):9-28).
- Zaiotti, R. (2007). Of friends and fences: Europe’s Neighbourhood Policy and the ‘gated community syndrome’. *Journal of European Integration*, 29(2), 143–162.
- Zardo, F. (2017). Migration, mobility and the challenge of co-ownership: Exploring EU-Tunisia post-revolutionary agenda. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 22(1), 75–89.
- Zardo, F., & Loschi, C. (2020). EU-Algeria (non)cooperation on migration: A tale of two fortresses. *Mediterranean Politics*, 27(2), 148–169.
- Zardo, F., & Wolff, S. (2022). Decentering the study of migration governance in the Mediterranean. *Geopolitics*, 27(3), 687–702.
- Zolberg, A. (2003). The archaeology of ‘remote control’. In A. Fahrmeir, O. Faron, & P. Weil (Eds.), *Migration control in the North Atlantic world: The evolution of state practices in Europe and the United States from*

the French Revolution to the inter-war period (pp. 195-222). Berghahn Books.

Appendix

Table 1. Overview Interviews

#	Description	Location	Date	Gender
1	Individual interview	Dakar	April 2023	M
2	Individual interview	Dakar	April 2023	M
3	Group interview (4 people)	Dakar	April/May 2023	M
4	Individual interview	Dakar	May 2023	M
5	Individual interview	Dakar	May 2023	M
6	Individual interview	Dakar	May 2023	M
7	Individual interview	St Louis	May 2023	M
8	Individual interview	Dakar	May 2023	M
9	Individual interview	Dakar	October 2024	F
10	Individual interview	Dakar	October 2024	M
11	Individual interview	Dakar	November 2024	F
12	Individual interview	Dakar	October 2024	M
13	Individual interview	Mbour	November 2024	F
14	Individual interview	Dakar	November 2023	F
15	Individual interview	Dakar	December 2023	F
16	Individual interview	Dakar	December 2023	M
17	Individual interview	St Louis	October 2023	F
18	Individual interview	St Louis	October 2024	M
19	Individual interview	Dakar	December 2023	M
20	Individual interview	Dakar	October 2023	M
21	Individual interview	Mbour	November 2023	F

#	Description	Location	Date	Gender
22	Individual interview	Mbour	November 2023	F
23	Individual interview	Mbour	November 2023	F
24	Group interview (2 people)	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
25	Individual interview	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
26	Individual interview	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	F
27	Group interview (2 people)	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	F/M
28	Individual interview	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
29	Group interview (3 people)	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
30	Group interview (3 people)	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
31	Individual Interview	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
32	Individual Interview	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	F
33	Group interview (4 people)	Joal-Fadiouth	November 2023	M
34	Group interview (2 people)	Kaolack	December 2023	M
35	Individual interview	Kaolack	December 2023	F
36	Individual interview	Kaolack	December 2023	M
37	Individual interview	Kaolack	December 2023	M
38	Individual interview	Kaolack	December 2023	M
39	Individual interview	Casamance	November 2024	M
40	Individual interview	Casamance	November 2024	M
41	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	M
42	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
43	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
44	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
45	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
46	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
47	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F

#	Description	Location	Date	Gender
48	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
49	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
50	Individual interview	Kolda	November 2024	F
51	Group interview (2 people)	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
52	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
53	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
54	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
55	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
56	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
57	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
58	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
59	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
60	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
61	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
62	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
63	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
64	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
65	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
66	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
67	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
68	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	M
69	Individual interview	Tambacounda	November 2024	F
70	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
71	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
72	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	F
73	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
74	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
75	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
76	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M

#	Description	Location	Date	Gender
77	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
78	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
79	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
80	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
81	Individual interview	Tambacounda	December 2024	M
82	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	F
83	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	M
84	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	M
85	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	M
86	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	M
87	Individual interview	Casamance	December 2024	M

Lund Political Science

1. Ruin, Olof. Kooperativa förbundet 1899-1929. En organisationsstudie. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1960.
2. Vallinder, Torbjörn. I kamp för demokratin. Rösträttsrörelsen i Sverige 1886-1900. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 1962.
3. Petersson, Hans F. Power and International Order. An Analytic Study of Four Schools of Thought and Their Approaches to the War, the Peace and the Postwar System 1914-1919. Lund: Gleerups, 1964.
4. Westerhult, Bo. Kronofogde, häradskrivare, länsman. Den svenska fögderiförvaltningen 1810-1917. Lund: Gleerups, 1966.
5. Wieslander, Hans. I nedrustningens tecken. Intressen och aktiviteter kring försvarsfrågan 1918-1925. Lund: Gleerups, 1966.
6. Söderberg, Olof. Motororganisationerna i Sverige. Bakgrund, grupperingar, aktiviteter. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1966.
7. Sjöblom, Gunnar. Party Strategies in a Multiparty System. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1968.
8. Hydén, Göran. TANU Yajenga Nchi. Political Development in Rural Tanzania. Lund: Uniskol, 1968.
9. Lindeberg, Sven-Ola. Nödhjälp och samhällsneutralitet. Svensk arbetslöshetspolitik 1920-1923. Lund: Uniskol, 1968.
10. Westerhult, Bo. Underdåniga påtryckningar. Fögderitjänstemännens intressebevakning från 1800-talets början till år 1918. Lund: Gleerups, 1969.
11. Bergquist, Mats. Sverige och EEC. En statsvetenskaplig studie av fyra åsiktsriktningars syn på svensk marknadspolitik 1961-62. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1970.
12. Lundquist, Lennart. Means and Goals of Political Decentralization. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1972.
13. Bjurulf, Bo. An Analysis of Some Aspects of the Voting Process. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1972.
14. Stenelo, Lars-Göran. Mediation in International Negotiations. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1972.
15. Lindquist, Stellan. Linkages between Domestic and Foreign Policy: The Record of Ghana. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1974.
16. Bjurulf, Bo. A Dynamic Analysis of Scandinavian Roll-Call Behavior. A Test of a Prediction Model of Ten Minority Situations in Three Countries. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1974.
17. Hermerén, Henrik. Regeringsbildningen i flerpartisystem, Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1975.
18. Johannesson, Conny. Studier över Svenska metallindustriarbetarförbundets förhandlingsorganisation vid förbundsförhandlingar – med samordning. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1975.
19. Peterson, Carl-Gunnar. Ungdom och politik. En studie av Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Ungdomsförbund. Stockholm: Frihets förlag, 1975.

20. Bryder, Tom. Power and Responsibility. Contending Approaches to Industrial Relations and Decision Making in Britain 1963-1971. Lund: Gleerups, 1975.
21. Jönsson, Christer. The Soviet Union and the Test Ban: A Study in Soviet Negotiation Behavior. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1975.
22. Kronvall, Kai. Politisk masskommunikation i ett flerpartisystem. Sverige – en fallstudie. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1975.
23. Liljequist, Gunnar. Distribution av kommunal service. Lund: Liber, 1977.
24. Lartey, George W. The Fourth Dimension: the argument against the theory of evolutionary stages of social development. Malmö: Gotab, 1977.
25. Weston, David. Realism, Language and Social Theories. Studies in the Relation of the Epistemology of Science and Politics. Lund, 1978.
26. Hagström, Bo. 1971 års länsförvaltningsreform. En utvärdering. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1978.
27. Skogmar, Gunnar. Atompolitik. Sambandet mellan militärt och civilt utnyttjande av atomenergi i amerikansk utrikespolitik 1945-1973. Malmö: Stenvalls Förlag, 1979.
28. Sannerstedt, Anders. Fri konkurrens eller politisk styrning? 1963 års trafikpolitiska beslut – debatten om innehåll, tillämpning och effekter. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1979.
29. Lidén, Anders. Security and Recognition. A Study of Change in Israel's Official Doctrine 1967-1974. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1979.
30. Magnusson, Håkan. Kommunerna och den regionala planeringen. En analys av länsplaneringen och den fysiska riksplaneringen. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1980.
31. Stenelo, Lars-Göran. Foreign Policy Predictions. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1980.
32. Lundell, Bengt. MBL utan avtal. Kommunerna och MBL. Helsingborg, 1981.
33. Norrving, Bengt. Kommunerna och bostadsförsörjningen. En analys av bostadsplaneringen. Lund: Liber, 1981.
34. Linderöth, Sven. Från konkurrens till monopol. En studie av lokal politisk och ekonomisk journalistik. Malmö: Dialog, 1981.
35. Forje, John. The One and Indivisible Cameroon: Political Integration and Socio-Economic Development in a Fragmented Society. Lund, 1981.
36. Adebo, Tarekgn. Ideological Trends in the Political Thinking of the Developing Regions: The Case of Sub Saharan Africa. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1982.
37. Elgström, Ole. Aktiv utrikespolitik. En jämförelse mellan svensk och dansk parlamentarisk utrikesdebatt 1962-1978. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1982.
38. Lindkvist, Kent. Program och parti: principprogram och partiideologi inom den kommunistiska rörelsen i Sverige 1917-1972. Lund: Arkiv för studier i arbetarrörelsens historia, 1982.
39. Bergström, Tomas och Lundell, Bengt. Från MBL till MBA. Kommunerna och MBL. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1982.
40. Hörberg, Thomas. Prediktion, osäkerhet och risk i internationella förhandlingar. En studie av svenskt förhandlingsbeteende vid förhandlingarna med Sovjetunionen 1940-41 om ett handelsavtal. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1983.

41. Geraedts, Henry. The People's Republic of China: Foreign Economic Relations and Technology Acquisition 1972-1981. Lund: Forskningspolitiska institutet, 1983.
42. Jerneck, Magnus. Kritik som utrikespolitiskt medel. En studie av de amerikanska reaktionerna på den svenska Vietnamkritiken Lund: Dialogos, 1983.
43. Stenelo, Lars-Göran. The International Critic. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1984.
44. Bergström, Thomas och Lundell, Bengt. Lokalt medbestämmande. Kommunerna och MBL. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1984.
45. Sjölin, Mats. Kommunalpolitiken i massmediernas spegel. En studie av dagspressen och lokalradions bevakning av fem kommuner. Lund: Dialogos, 1985.
46. Albinsson, Per. Skiftningar i blått. Förändringar inom Moderata Samlingspartiets riksorganisation 1960-1985. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1986.
47. Jonsson, Rolf. De okända förhandlingarna. Statens förhandlingsråd och regeringens MBL-förhandlingar. Lund: Dialogos, 1986.
48. Polak, Jiri. Dependence Patterns in the Soviet Bloc: The Case of Romania and East Germany. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1986.
49. Lundell, Bengt. Kommunerna och MBL. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1986.
50. Rothstein, Bo. Den socialdemokratiska staten. Reformen och förvaltning inom svensk arbetsmarknads- och skolorpolitik. Lund: Arkiv, 1986.
51. Pierre, Jon. Partikongresser och regeringspolitik. En studie av den socialdemokratiska partikongressens beslutsfattande och inflytande 1948-1978. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1986.
52. Schmidt, Stephan. Pionjärer, efterföljare och avvaktare. Innovationer och deras spridning bland svenska primärkommuner. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1986.
53. Westerlund, Ulf. Superpower Roles. A Comparative Analysis of United States and Soviet Foreign Policy. Lund: Department of Political Science, 1987.
54. Lundquist, Lennart. Implementation Steering. An Actor-Structure Approach. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1987.
55. Stenelo, Lars-Göran, red. Statsvetenskapens mångfald. Festskrift till Nils Stjernquist. Lund: Lund University Press, 1987.
56. Nilsson, Ann-Sofie. Political Uses of International Law. Lund: Dialogos, 1987.
57. Bergström, Tomas. Konkurrerande eller kompletterande demokrati? Om företagsdemokrati i de svenska kommunerna. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1988.
58. Lindell, Ulf. Modern Multinational Negotiation: The Consensus Rule and Its Implications in International Conferences. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1988.
59. Stenelo, Lars-Göran, red. Makten över den decentraliserade skolan. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1988.
60. Lundquist, Lennart. Byråkratisk etik. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1988

61. Petersson, Harry, red. Vem styr förändringarna inom sjukvården – politiker eller de medicinska professionerna? En studie av sub-specielliseringen inom ortopedin. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1989.
62. Jonsson, Rolf. Fackligt inflytande och politisk demokrati. En analys av regeringens MBL-förhandlingar. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1989.
63. Johannesson, Bengt. Kommunal bostadspolitik. Lund: Kommunfakta Förlag, 1989.
64. Aronson, Torbjörn. Konservatism och demokrati. En rekonstruktion av fem svenska högerledares styrelsedoktriner. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1990.
65. Petersson, Bo. The Soviet Union and Peacetime Neutrality in Europe. A Study of Soviet Political Language. Göteborg: MH Publishing, 1990.
66. Lundquist, Lennart. Förvaltning och demokrati. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1991.
67. Höjelid, Stefan. Sovjetbilden i nordisk press. Svenska, norska och finländska reaktioner på sovjetiskt agerande. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1991.
68. Jansson, Per. Säkerhetspolitikens språk: Myt och metafor i svensk säkerhetspolitisk diskurs 1919-1939. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1991.
69. Johansson, Jörgen. Offentligt och privat i regionalpolitiken. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1991.
70. Lundquist, Lennart. Förvaltning, stat och samhälle. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1992.
71. Håkansson, Anders. Konsten att vinna ett val. En studie av fram- och tillbakagångar för socialdemokraterna i kommunalvalet 1988. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1992.
72. Ternblad, Klas. Planering i norm och handling. Studier av en epok av landstingsplanering. Lund: Wi, 1992.
73. Persson, Stefan. Dödlägen i internationella förhandlingar. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1992.
74. Sannerstedt, Anders. Förhandlingar i riksdagen. Lund: Lund University Press, 1992.
75. Lundquist, Lennart. Ämbetsman eller direktör? Förvaltningschefens roll i demokratin. Stockholm: Norstedts, 1993.
76. Gynnerstedt, Kerstin. Etik i hemtjänst. En studie av förvaltnings- och professionsetik. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1993.
77. Schartau, Mai-Brith. The Public Sector Middle Manager: The Puppet who Pulls the Strings? Lund: Wi, 1993.
78. Sjölin, Mats. Coalition Politics and Parliamentary Power. Lund: Lund University Press, 1993.
79. Stenelo, Lars-Göran och Norrving, Bengt, red. Lokal Makt. Lund: Lund University Press, 1993.
80. Iwanaga, Kazuki. Images, Decisions and Consequences in Japan's Foreign Policy. Lund: Lund University Press, 1993.
81. Tita-Ghebdinga, Legala. African and O.A.U. Diplomacy on Dual Paradigms of Self-Determination 1945-1985. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1993.

82. Lundquist, Lennart. Statsvetenskaplig förvaltningsanalys. Problem, trender och program. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1994.
83. Blom, Agneta P. Kommunalt chefskap – en studie om ansvar, ledarskap och demokrati. Lund: Dialogos, 1994.
84. Agevall, Lena. Beslutsfattandets rutinisering. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1994.
85. Andersson, Jan A. Nordiskt samarbete: aktörer, idéer och organisering 1919-1953. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1994.
86. Bengtsson, Hans. Förskolereformen. En studie i implementering av svensk välfärdspolitik 1985-1991. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1995.
87. Uhlin, Anders. Democracy and Diffusion. Transnational Lesson-Drawing among Indonesian Pro-Democracy Actors. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1995.
88. Kinnvall, Catarina. Cultural Diffusion and Political Learning. The Democratization of China. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1995.
89. Westlind, Dennis. The Politics of Popular Identity. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
90. Stubbergaard, Ylva. Stat, kris och demokrati. Lapporörelsens inflytande i Finland 1929-1932. Lund: Arkiv, 1996.
91. Sendabo, Teferi. Foreign Aid and State Sovereignty: The Ethio-Swedish Aid Cooperation. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1996.
92. Mattson, Ingvar. Förhandlingsparlamentarism. En jämförande studie av riksdagen och folketinget. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
93. Larsson, Per. Regimförhandlingar på miljöområdet. En studie av förhandlingarna om LRTAP-konventionen. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1996.
94. Stenelo, Lars-Göran och Jerneck, Magnus, red. The Bargaining Democracy. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
95. McKnight, Utz Lars. Political Liberalism and the Politics of Race. Beyond Perfectionism and Culture. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
96. Steiner, Kristian. Strategies for International Legitimacy. Lund: Lund University Press, 1996.
97. Lundquist, Lennart. Fattigvårdsfolket. Ett nätverk i den sociala frågan 1900-1920. Lund: Lund University Press, 1997.
98. Andersson, Ronny. Medborgarna, politikerna och sjukvården. En studie av attityder och demokrati. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1997.
99. Kronsell, Annica. Greening the EU: Power practices, resistances and agenda setting. Lund: Lund University Press, 1997.
100. Thunborg, Annika. Public and Non-Profit Interaction: U.S. Assistance to Eastern European Media 1989-1995. Lund: Lund University Press, 1997.
101. Johansson, Karl Magnus. Transnational Party Alliances: Analysing the Hard-Won Alliance Between Conservatives and Christian Democrats in the European Parliament. Lund: Lund University Press, 1997.

102. Badom, Ted Gogote. *Foreign Intervention in Internal Wars*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1997.
103. Söderholm, Peter. *Global Governance of AIDS: Partnerships with Civil Society*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1997.
104. Lundquist, Lennart. *Demokratins väktare. Ämbetsmännen och vårt offentliga etos*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1998.
105. Gustavsson, Jakob. *The Politics of Foreign Policy Change. Explaining the Swedish Reorientation on EC Membership*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1998.
106. Hall, Patrik. *The Social Construction of Nationalism: Sweden as an Example*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1998.
107. Sönne, Maria. *Administrative Reforms and the Quest for Foreign Investment in China – The Case of Shenzhen*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1999.
108. Aggestam, Karin. *Reframing and Resolving Conflict. Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations 1988-1998*. Lund: Lund University Press, 1999.
109. Tallberg, Jonas. *Making States Comply: The European Commission, the European Court of Justice, and the Enforcement of the Internal Market*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1999.
110. Hall, Martin. *Constructing Historical Realism: International Relations as Comparative History*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1999.
111. Spång, Mikael. *Justice and Society: Problems of Reformist Politics*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 1999.
112. Svedberg, Erika. *The “Other” Recreated: A Relational Approach to East-West Negotiations*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2000.
113. Ericson, Magnus. *A Realist Stable Peace: Power, Threat and the Development of a Shared Norwegian-Swedish Democratic Security Identity 1905-1940*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2000.
114. Bengtsson, Rikard. *Trust, Threat, and Stable Peace: Swedish Great Power Perceptions 1905-1939*. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2000.
115. Stoltz, Pauline. *About Being (T)here and Making a Difference? Black Women and the Paradox of Visibility*. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2000.
116. Bäckstrand, Karin. *What Can Nature Withstand? Science, Politics and Discourses in Transboundary Air Pollution Diplomacy*. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2001.
117. Lundquist, Lennart. *Medborgardemokratien och eliterna*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001.
118. Hedin, Astrid. *The Politics of Social Networks: Interpersonal Trust and Institutional Change in Post-Communist East Germany*. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2001.
119. Sundström, Mikael. *Connecting Social Science and Information Technology. Democratic Privacy in the Information Age*. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2001.
120. Jönsson, Christer, Jerneck, Magnus och Stenelo, Lars-Göran, red. *Politik i globaliseringens tid*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001.

121. Gustafsson, Rune. Syntes och design. Den intellektuelle politikern som konstnär. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2001.
122. Danjoux, Olivier. L'Etat, C'est Pas Moi. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2002.
123. Jönsson, Kristina. Translating Foreign Ideas into Domestic Practices. Pharmaceutical Policies in Laos and Vietnam. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2002.
124. Bengtsson, Marie. Stat och kommun i makt(o)balans. En studie av flyktingmottagandet. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2002.
125. Björkdahl, Annika. From Idea to Norm. Promoting Conflict Prevention. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2002.
126. Badersten, Björn. Medborgardyg. Den europeiska staden och det offentliga rummets etos. Stockholm: Bokförlaget natur och kultur, 2002.
127. Boussard, Caroline. Crafting Democracy. Civil Society in Post-Transition Honduras. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2003.
128. Janson, Per. "Den huvudlösa idén": Medborgarlön, välfärdspolitik och en blockerad debatt. Lund: Arkiv, 2003.
129. Santesson-Wilson, Peter. Studier i symbolpolitik. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2003.
130. Johnson, Björn. Policspridning som översättning. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen och Arbetslivsinstitutet, 2003.
131. Sundström, Mikael, Rosén, Malena och Hall, Martin. En guide till mellanstatliga organisationer. Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2004.
132. Sjövik, Kristian. Demokrati bortom nationalstaten? Lund: Department of Political Science, 2004.
133. Hellström, Lennart. Brandts politiska tänkande. En studie i kontinuiteten i Brandts politiska tänkande. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2004.
134. Lindberg, Staffan. The Power of Elections – Democratic Participation, Competition and Legitimacy in Africa. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2004.
135. Bexell, Magdalena. Exploring Responsibility. Public and Private in Human Rights Protection. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
136. Jerre, Ulrika. Conflicting Logics? Implementing Capacity and EU Adaptation in a Postcommunist Context. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
137. Rindelfjäll, Teresia. Democracy Beyond the Ballot Box. Citizen Participation and Social Rights in Post-Transition Chile. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
138. Fernandez, Christian. Medborgarskap efter nationalstaten? Ett konstruktivt förslag. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
139. Nilsson, Tom. Till vilken nytta? Om det lokala politiska deltagandets karaktär, komplexitet och konsekvenser. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
140. Strippel, Johannes. Climate Change after the International: Rethinking Security, Territory and Authority. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.

141. Erlingsson, Gissur. Varför bildas nya partier? Om kollektivt handlande och partientreprenörer. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
142. Strömvik, Maria. To Act as a Union. Explaining the Development of the EU's Collective Foreign Policy. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2005.
143. Niklasson, Tomas. Regime Stability and Foreign Policy Change: Interaction between Domestic and Foreign Policy in Hungary 1956-1994. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2006.
144. Hellström, Anders. Bringing Europe Down to Earth. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2006.
145. Melander, Fredrik. Lokal Forskningspolitik: Institutionell dynamik och organisatorisk omvandling vid Lunds Universitet 1980-2005. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2006.
146. Hegeland, Hans. Nationell EU-parlamentarism. Riksdagens arbete med EU-frågorna. Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press, 2006.
147. Lundquist, Lennart. Att hantera humanvetenskapens tudelning. Malmö: Liber, 2006.
148. Ahnens, Anette. A Quest for Legitimacy. Debating UN Security Council Rules on Terrorism and Non-proliferation. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2007.
149. Alasfoor, Reyadh. The Gulf Cooperation Council: Achievements and Challenges. A Political Analysis to the Study of Regional Integration of the GCC States. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2007.
150. Hedlund, Maria. Demokratiska genvägar: Expertinflytande i den svenska lagstiftningsprocessen om medicinsk genteknik. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2007.
151. Bolin, Anna. The military profession in change – the case of Sweden. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2008.
152. Broman, Matilda. Taking Advantage of Institutional Possibilities and Network Opportunities. Analyzing Swedish Strategic Action in EU Negotiations. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2008.
153. Kalm, Sara. Governing Global Migration. Lund: Department of Political Science, 2008.
154. Rosén Sundström, Malena. Förankring av socialdemokratisk EU-politik. Med rum för demokratisk debatt? Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2008.
155. Dannestam, Tove. Stadspolitik i Malmö. Politikens meningsskapande och materialitet. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2009.
156. Knaggård, Åsa. Vetenskaplig osäkerhet i policyprocessen. En studie av svensk klimatpolitik. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2009.
157. Uçarlar, Nesrin. Between Majority Power and Minority Resistance: Kurdish Linguistic Rights in Turkey. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2009.
158. Conrad, Maximilian. Between Communication and Community. EU Constitution-Making, a European Public Sphere and the (Un-)likelihood of Transnational Political Debate. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2009.

159. Scuzzarello, Sarah. *Caring Multiculturalism. Local Immigrant Policies and Narratives of Integration in Malmö, Birmingham and Bologna*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2010.
160. Strömbom, Lisa. *Revisiting the Past. Israeli identity, thick recognition and conflict transformation*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2010.
161. Fägersten, Björn. *Sharing Secrets. Explaining International Intelligence Cooperation*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2010.
162. Karlsson, Rasmus. *Three essays on our planetary future*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2010.
163. Lundquist, Lennart. *Flocken i massamhället. Den politiska ordningens villkor och uttryck*. Lund: Arkiv, 2011.
164. Lundquist, Lennart. *Slutet på yttrandefriheten (och demokratin?)*. Stockholm: Carlssons, 2012.
165. Wahman, Michael. *Uniting Against Autocrats*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2012.
166. Hultén, John. *Ny väg till nya vägar och järnvägar*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2012.
167. Mukhtar-Landgren, Dalia. *Planering för framsteg och gemenskap: om den kommunala utvecklingsplaneringens idémässiga förutsättningar*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2012.
168. Lund, Emma. *Hybrid Governance in Practice – Public and Private Actors in the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2013.
169. Gustafsson, Nils. *Leetocracy: Political participation, social network sites and inequality*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2013.
170. Persson, Anders. *Defining, Securing and Building a Just Peace: The EU and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2013.
171. Melander, Stina. *Kassakultur i förändring. Samspelet mellan organisationskultur och administrativa reformer på Försäkringskassan*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen 2013.
172. Hildingsson, Roger. *Governing Decarbonization: The State and the New Politics of Climate Change*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2014.
173. Narby, Petter. *Time of Crisis: Order, Politics, Temporality*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2014.
174. Pettersson, Jonna. *Incalculable Community*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2015.
175. Rennick, Sarah Anne. *The Practice of Politics and Revolution: Egypt's Revolutionary Youth Social Movement*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2015.
176. Fredén, Annika. *Strategic Voting under Coalition Governments*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
177. Edenborg, Emil. *Nothing more to see: Contestation of belonging and visibility in Russian media*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen och Malmö: Institutionen för globala politiska studier, 2016.

178. Nielsen, Tobias D. Words Matter in the Woods: Discourses on Deforestation in Global Climate Politics. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
179. Ingesson, Tony. The Politics of Combat: the Political and Strategic Impact of Tactical-Level Subcultures, 1939-1995. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
180. Altermark, Niklas. After Inclusion: Intellectual Disability as Biopolitics. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
181. von Schéele, Cecilia. The Void. Urban wasteland as political space. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
182. Gustafsson, Sofie. Medborgarskapande på olika villkor. Självbilder, skolkoder och syn på kunskap i den svenska gymnasieskolan. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
183. Knotz, Carlo. Getting Tough on Unemployment: Essays on the politics of unemployment benefit reform in affluent democracies. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2016.
184. Nilsson, Klas. The Money of Monarchs: The importance of nontax revenue for autocratic rule in early modern Sweden. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2017.
185. Nyberg, Linda. Market Bureaucracy: Neoliberalism, Competition and EU State Aid Policy? Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2017.
186. Andersson, Per. Essays on the Politics of Taxation. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2017.
187. Gusic, Ivan. War, peace & the city: Urban conflicts over peace(s) in postwar Belfast, Mitrovica and Mostar. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2017.
188. Fred, Mats. Projectification The Trojan Horse of Local Government. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
189. Waaranperä, Ulrika. Histories of land. Politicization, property and belonging in Molo, Kenya. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
190. Engstrand, Sandra. State Learning and Role Playing – International environmental cooperation in the Arctic Council. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
191. Chaib, Josef. Experts, Evidence, and Other Knowledge: The Government of Welfare Collaboration. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
192. Boyer, Kurtis. An Autocracy of Empathy: A Relational Approach to Understanding our Failure to Recognize the Moral Significance of the Nonhuman. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
193. Hedling, Elsa. Blending Politics and New Media – Mediatized Practices of EU Digital Diplomacy. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
194. Vänbok till Ole Elgström. The EU and the emerging global order. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2018.
195. Östbring, Björn. Migrationspolitiska dilemman. Om idealism och realism i liberal politisk teori. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2019.

196. Orange, Mia. *Sustaining Authoritarianism: Clientelism and Repression in Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, Tanzania and Kazakhstan*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2019.
197. Möller, Ina. *The Emergent Politics of Geoengineering*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2019.
198. Lindberg, Mårten. *Why Sweden suspended military service: tracing the policy process, 1990 to 2009*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2019.
199. Lindberg, Helena G. *The constitutive power of maps in the Arctic*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2019.
200. Lorentzen, Jenny. *Normative Encounters between the 'Global' and the 'Local': Women, Peace and Security in Mali and Rwanda*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2020.
201. Justesen, Lisa. *The emerging outer space order. Professional orders, heterarchy, hypermodernity and political reason*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2021.
202. Strandgaard, Jakob. *Normative recursion – on recursive grounding and the capacity for radical critique in formal pragmatics, recognition, social freedom and justification*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2021.
203. Andersson, Rikard. *Bridges, Walls, Doors: On democracy and Nature*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2021.
204. Røed, Maiken. *Interest Group Influence on Political Parties in Western Democracies*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2021.
205. Ikenze, Sarai-Anne. *Policy Choices in African Structural Adjustment: An Exploration of Sectoral Continuity*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
206. Cristiano, Fabio. *The Blurring Politics of Cyber Conflict: A Critical Study of the Digital in Palestine and Beyond*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
207. Ølgaard, Daniel Møller. *The Technopolitics of Compassion: A Postphenomenological Analysis of the Digital Mediation of Global Humanitarianism*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
208. Davidsson, Simon. *The Development of Parliamentarism in Western Europe*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
209. Rogers, Katren. *After Asylums and Orphanages*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
210. Kristinsson, Thorsteinn. *Webs of World Order: A Relational Theory of Rising Powers and the Evolution of International Order*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2022.
211. Gustafsson, Daniel. *The Present People*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2023.
212. Viksand, Sindre Gade. *A World of Persons*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2023.
213. Isaksson, Elias. *Between Growth and Sustainability: Exploring the Construction of Sustainable Mobility in Swedish Transport Policy*. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2023.

214. de Leeuw, Georgia. The comfort of alignment: Mining, green steel, and killjoy desires in Sweden/Sápmi. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
215. Nicoson, Christie. Peace in a Changing Climate: Caring and Knowing the Climate-Gender-Peace Nexus. Lund: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
216. Karlsson, Caroline. The Prohibitive Condition: The Performativity of the Incest Taboo and its Incestuous Remainders. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
217. Wieslander, Anna. Transatlantic Transitions. Responses to the Russian Threat in the Baltic Sea Region, 2014-2020. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
218. Magalhaes Teixeira, Barbara. The Nature of Peace. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
219. Nitzschner, Patrick. Defending what is yet to come: A critical theory of democratic defence. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2024.
220. Behraves, Maysam. Political Psychology of Revisionist Behavior in World Politics: State Subjectivity, Ontological (In)Security and Iranian Foreign Policy. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
221. Calvo, Esther. Old Foe, New Friend? Rhetorical responses of mainstream parties towards a radical right party. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
222. Rodriguez Hedenbratt, Nicolas. The Politics of Radio and Television in Western Democracies. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
223. Wrange, Jana. Civil Defence (Re)Emerged: A Multi-Level Perspective on Policy Developments in Post-Crimea Europe. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
224. Holmberg, Karl. Embedded disposability: A cultural political economy of plastics. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
225. Stein, Anne Lene. Agonism against the Odds: Epistemic Disruptions and Bodies of Dissent in Palestine and Israel. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
226. Drake, Evan. From Lock-In to Phase-Out. Pathways Towards Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.
227. Pacciardi, Agnese. Mobility as a Practice: Border Externalisation and Colonial Encounters at the Euro-Senegalese borderlands. Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, 2025.

What do we learn about borders and migration policies when we examine them from the perspective of communities living in the borderlands, and through the theoretical lenses of mobility?

This thesis explores the effects of EU border externalisation policies on those most affected by them, focusing on the lived experiences of Senegalese communities throughout Senegal. Through extensive ethnographic fieldwork, it investigates how individuals and communities navigate, adapt to and contest the constraints imposed by externalised borders whether or not they are on the move. Drawing on and contributing to critical border and migration studies, and grounded in feminist decolonial epistemologies, this research shifts the analytical gaze from the border itself to mobility as a multidimensional practice: imagined, embodied, and political. In doing so, it reveals how the spillover effects of border externalisation extend far beyond individual border-crossers, embedding violence, death, and precarity into everyday life across entire communities. Yet, it also shows how these same individuals and communities reappropriate and resist these constraints through creative and strategic expressions of agency, making visible a broader range of possibilities that challenges dominant migration and border regimes.