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Continuously On The Move: A Study on Senegalese Art: Depicting “Migration” Through an Artistic Lens

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Continuously On The Move

A Study on Senegalese Art: Depicting “Migration” Through an Artistic Lens



Figure 1. A photo by the Senegalese artist Baba Diedhiou, from his exhibition *Identité* in Lyon, France (2022)

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

The arts have proven to be a transformative force for social change in the Senegalese context (Dimé, 2022; Gueye, 2013). This interdisciplinary study deploys an artistic lens to analyse the “migration” situation, as artists are an emerging actor in the Senegalese “migration” discourse. It adopts a more reflective stance in the study of “migration”-related art by exploring what knowledge Senegalese artists and artistic practices produce about “migration”. Through ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews, this research includes a series of reflections on artistic practices and the stories voiced by artists. The analysis follows the storyline of the documentary *Bataaxal* and is divided into four parts. The first focuses on the feeling that is produced by the aesthetic elements of art and how this relates to politics, by drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière (2003). The second subsequently focuses on the narrator’s memories, emotions, words, and phrases and how these are involved in the production of meaning. The third section then turns to a comparison between the broader thematic foci that are covered by the artists and their works. Conversely, the fourth section locates the role of place and time in the production of artistic practices. How these findings relate to existing academic work is then analysed in the discussion. Finally, the study concludes by reaffirming that artists are deeply rooted within “migration” discourses; however, the artists and their knowledge are intertwined with their milieu, as much as the created art is related to the construction of the phenomenon of “migration”. As a result, the transformative capacity of art is questionable, as the art may inadvertently reproduce dominant and problematic narratives that have been constructed by government policies and international organisations to frame people on the move as a problem.

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Introduction

This study examines Senegalese art as a lens through which to understand the contemporary “migration”¹ situation. Art participates in public discourse because it reflects people’s life stories. It can therefore be considered an expression and mechanism of power, where “particular social realities are conceived, made manifest, legitimated, naturalised, challenged, resisted and re-imagined” (Haynes et al., 2016: 15). Artistic practices thus provide insights into the public perceptions of “migration”, while also participating in the production of the phenomenon (van Dijk, 2018: 230). This study is therefore interested in what knowledge Senegalese art manifests about “migration”. These include questions related to what and how does art speak? And how does it relate to its milieu and “migration” discourses?

Previous work has similarly approached the study of “migration” through the arts (Aksoy, 2020; Kasinitz, 2014; Martiniello, 2022; Smith et al., 2013). For example, Wilson (2023) explored the role of music in the process of home-making for a “migrant” and “refugee” in the African megapolises of Kinshasa (capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo) and Dar es Salaam (the capital city of Tanzania). Most of the work however focused on the relation between art and the process of “integration” and identity construction in the post-migration context. They also focused on the study of “migrant” art: that is, art created by those people who are categorised as “migrants” and have experienced the “migration” process as they have crossed, or been immobilised by, physical and symbolic borders. This study, in contrast, takes on a novel approach that moves away from an exclusive consideration of the post-migration situation, and does not exclusively analyse “migrant” art. Instead, it aims to focus on art that addresses any aspect of the subject of “migration” and takes place within a context that encounters all stages of the “migration” process. The study is therefore not interested in classifying art, nor of its artists or “migration”. Rather, it is fascinated by the knowledge that art and its artists produce in order to understand the contemporary reality of the “migration” situation. With this approach, I therefore aim to illustrate the storytelling by art and artists tell on “migration”, and second, examine how the knowledge produced by artist stands in aligning, or contrasting with, academic work on “migration”. As a result, this thesis adopts an explorative and reflective approach that intertwines the subjects of art and “migration” as it explores the following research question:

What knowledge do Senegalese artists and their artistic practices produce about the contemporary “migration” situation?

¹ I have chosen to put quotation marks around various categories, such as “migration”, “migrant” and “irregular migration” because I want to highlight the conceptual problems of many categories that are used in the field of migration studies. People are placed in categories, which have material effects on their bodies, their feelings, their social relations, their assigned rights, and thus shape their everyday lives. The quotation marks therefore serve to draw attention to this issue. For analytical purposes, however, I have chosen to use these terms, and where possible, other terms such as “people on the move”.

The documentary *Bataaxal* functions as the main protagonist of *this* research story (Figure 2). This leads to an atypical structuring of this thesis; however, it creates a perfect backdrop for the analysis of other artists' stories and artistic practices. The sections of the film showcase the different stories showcasing life experiences and thematic focuses that are layered in both “migration” and art. It also allows the reader to relate to and become familiar with the topic: it humanises the lived experiences and emotions of people on the move by making them more tangible (Martinielli, 2022), while also illustrating the complexity and context of the study. This research story thus tells the stories of “migration” according to events of the film, which consequently makes it possible to unfold the reflected theories on “migration” produced through art.

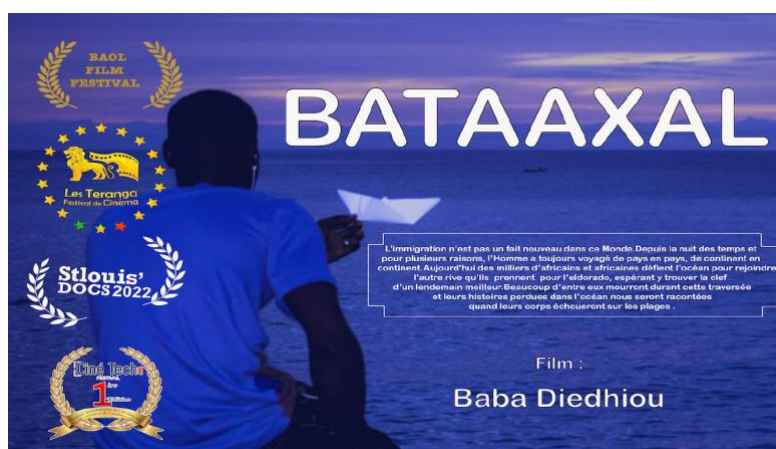


Figure 2. Official poster of the film *Bataaxal*, shared by the filmmaker, Baba Diedhiou (2023)

Arts-based research remains a relatively new interdisciplinary field within migration studies (Martiniello, 2022). There are however several reasons for engaging with this strand of work. As mentioned above, it can contribute to a better understanding of the “migration” story as it rehumanises the phenomenon and makes the “migrant” reality more tangible. Adopting this approach can therefore help to go beyond the portrayal of “migrants” as passive actors and victims of global inequalities, as some “migration” theories do (de Haas, 2021). The governance of human mobility is also extremely complex, as it is increasingly multi-levelled, multi-actor and multi-sited (Gazzotti, Moutaah & Natter, 2022). Many studies on “migration” however produce one-dimensional views that do not do justice to the complexity of this phenomenon. Since art offers the possibility to deepen insights through multiple stories, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding of the “migration” situation as it can illuminate different angles of the phenomenon. Finally, there is a growing convergence and interdependence between the art scene and “migration”, where awareness-raising campaigns are increasingly part of new development interventions (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021; Vammen, 2022), with artists becoming actors in these activities. Analysing this development can therefore reveal how

artists navigate this complex playing field and how their stories align, or misalign, with other “migration” discourses.

The argument of this research story is structured as follows. I first describe the eclectic approach of this study and its methodological considerations. Second, I directly delve into an in-depth analysis of the encountered artworks and the conversations with the artists. Here I address the following: I analyse and interpret the aesthetics of the art, delve into the flows of events that are narrated and the feelings associated with these lived experiences, scrutinise the broader thematic foci that are covered by the artists and their works, discuss the ways in which “migration” and “migrant” realities are constructed, and further how art is entangled with its environment by drawing on the concepts of place and time. The third chapter then situates this study within the existing literature and relates the artists’ theories to the academic literature on “migration”, and finally, makes a concluding statement.

How I Approached the Field

This research story aims to analyse the contribution of artists and their artistic practices to the production of knowledge about “migration”. The design of the study draws on qualitative and arts-based approaches to doing research. This relates to the exploratory and interpretive nature of the study as I inductively discuss various forms of art that I encountered during my fieldwork in Dakar (the capital city of Senegal). I furthermore draw on a social constructivist theoretical school of thought: in other words, I seek to understand how artists, who have their own realities, experiences, and social relations, socially construct theories on “migration”. At the core of this research, therefore, is the question of how discourse is socially shaped and constituted by artists and their artistic practices.

The approach taken to the field is further characterised by its interdisciplinarity. According to Pink (2012: 8), an interdisciplinary study “combines the practices, theories and ideas of different disciplines to produce novel outcomes and contributions to knowledge, theory and applied interventions”. The strength of this interdisciplinary approach is that different perspectives create different realities, and therefore, can result in a more holistic, but never complete picture of a phenomenon (Nyamnjoh, 2019). The disciplines that this study primarily draws from are those of anthropology and human geography. Anthropology stems from the study of the “Other” has often analysed “migration” inductively, for example by focusing on the experience of the “migrant” and the impact of “migration” on social relations (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022: 5). Similarly, geographers focus on these relational dimensions, but in contrast place socio-spatial patterns at the centre of their studies (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022: 6). Both disciplines recur in this study as I analyse the narrative side of art. On the one hand, the first discipline relates to how I analyse the aesthetics of artistic practices themselves, their narratives, and social imaginaries. On the other hand, the second discipline relates to how I focus on the roles and experiences of artists, asking how their environment has given meaning to their artistic practices.

In addition to employing different disciplines, I also use art as an artistic lens as it allows the study to transcend multiple units of analysis. In particular, I draw from the work of Jacques Rancière (2002; 2013; 2015) to explain how art is deeply intertwined with politics and is therefore an appropriate tool to study society. According to Rancière (2013: 13), art intervenes with “the distribution of the sensible”: that is, it can reshape or reconstruct the dominant social order in society by determining whose voices are heard. He as a result argues that the aesthetics of art and politics cannot be separated: in fact, they are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, aesthetics is “a system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to the sense experience” (Rancière, 2013: 13). Put simply, aesthetics relates to the construction, perception, and materialisation of meaning through the senses. Politics, on the other hand, similarly “revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière, 2004:

13). In this sense, Rancière (2004) refers to the re-arrangement of hierarchal power structures as going beyond traditional political institutions, for example, in communities or public spaces. He therefore argues that art can disrupt the prevailing social order and has the capacity to reconfigure the frameworks of the social and political world. Similarly, Möller (2015: 1) argues that art “plays a formative role in the constitution of social life, in the ways in which people take responsibility for creating their own histories, for participating in the management of their own social and political realities”. However, he adds to this by drawing on Edelman (1995), who notes that art is guided by artists’ political values and discourses, even when this is not intentional. An artistic lens therefore can create thicker descriptions and deeper understandings of the “migration” situation by inductively gaining insights into the lived experiences of people, the “place” wherein these experiences have gained meaning, and finally, how this is materialized into a new social and political reality.

The interdisciplinary approach of this study is also evident in the methods of data collection. The epistemological position of the study centred firstly on lived experiences of individuals in their roles of as artists and their activities and secondly on the stories that they told through their art. As a result, there are multiple forms of data collection, including qualitative semi-structured interviews and an ethnography of performative and visual artistic practices. As this thesis is grounded in a social constructivist ontological stance, I consequently approached the analysis of my findings through a discourse analysis.

Searching for Stories

My search for “migration”-related art started within the geographical context of Dakar for a number of reasons. First, the city has a vibrant art scene, as it is also the host to one of the leading art gatherings in Africa: i.e., the Biennale of Contemporary African Art (Nzewi & Fillitz, 2020). Second, this capital city is home to many national government institutions, international organisations, and NGOs working on “migration” policies and practices across Senegal and the wider region. Third, my internship organisation was based in Dakar. Finally, Dakar is often a point of “destination”, “transit” or “origin” for many “migrants” who wish to travel abroad in the hope of a better future (IOM, 2023a). For these reasons, I assumed I would be able to locate art that told stories about the “migration” situation. But how did the search for these stories proceed?

Finding artists and artistic practices initially seemed not too challenging; after the first week of speaking to people at my internship office and meeting new friends that I was encountering outside of my work, I was overloaded with phone numbers and suggestions of who to speak with. In the Senegalese culture of hospitality (“*Teranga*”), the snowball sampling method seemed to work very smoothly: namely, everyone was eager to help and dig through their contacts. This meant that after the first three weeks I

had some first encounters and interviews planned, but I soon became a bit overwhelmed as I realised many of the contacts were not relevant for my research. This was partially related to how I had the intention of focusing on activist-art. I however soon realised I should instead take art for what it was and see what it embodied, instead of assuming it was going to be “critical-art”. According to Mouffe (2013), “critical” art relates to those artistic practices that reject the dominant order and look beyond it by proposing alternatives. I consequently chose to neglect this focus on art as being critical and instead focused on art as something beholding and reflecting meaning on social life. This is because I was not interested in what art exactly “moved” within society, but rather, what meanings and views the art manifested. For this reason, I had to continue to explore what art was out there and decided to set off to cultural centres, such as the *Centre Culturel régional de Dakar Blaise Senghor* in Grand-Dakar and the *Centre Culturelle Léopold Sedar Senghor* in Pikini. Other places I visited were *Guédiawaye Hip Hop* centre, a cultural association, and finally, *Espace jeunes de Wakhinane*, a performing arts theatre also based in the area of Guédiawaye. Through these various pathways, I eventually encountered several artists and artistic practices (see *Table 1*).

It is important to note that this work should not be seen as an exhaustive account of artists and artistic practices related to “migration” in Senegal. The number of Senegalese artists involved on this subject is rather extensive as I discovered at a workshop organised by the French Development Agency (ADF) on *Edutainment*. At this workshop many actors from within the cultural sector and art scene were present to discuss the development entertainment and educational programmes on “migration”. Due to the scope and time limit of this study, I have therefore been unapologetically selective. How did I make these choices?

I first of all followed the chronology of my encounters, i.e., a type of “first comes first served” principle, because this gave me the time to develop relationships with people. Second, I made choices on the basis of language and on the feeling whether or not I could have fruitful conversations with the artists, and third, I tried to incorporate different genres, and within those genres, also selecting different styles and artists who were at different stages of their career (e.g., not only talking to well-known rap artists). This means the study therefore comes with its limitations as it most likely has excluded some important names in the scene who potentially have a significant voice or influence. I furthermore have neglected some genres, for example, within the music scene, I did not engage with the work of slam poets and hip-hop artists, who are both known for their protest songs against the malpractices of politicians (De Bruijn & Oudenhuisen, 2021); the latter group of artists was however intentional since the hip-hop scene has been widely studied in Senegal (Appert, 2018; Dimé 2022; Enz & Bryson, 2014; Gueye, 2013). Another limitation is that I had to incorporate a multitude of genres and styles, which posed a challenge when it came to the processing and analysing of the studied artistic practices. I touch upon how I deal with this issue in the following section (*Analysing Stories*).

Despite the limitations linked to the selection of artists and artistic practices, I feel that I have mastered the topic and its contextuality through my fieldwork and research internship. My fieldwork took place in-between February 1 and April 28, 2023. The encounters involved conducting in-depth interviews (8), participant observations (2), the collection of lyrics (3 songs and 1 album), photo series (2) and documentaries (1). Prior to conducting my interviews and participant observations, I had informal meetings where I explained my research, handed out information letters and participants had the opportunity to ask questions. All the interviews were furthermore conducted in French and were accompanied by an interview guide. Besides my fieldwork, I also gained knowledge through my research internship and the workshop that I attended at the ADF. Fruitful discussions were held at this workshop, where the topic and development of education and entertainment (i.e., “Edutainment”) productions concerning “migration” were heavily debated by various actors. Some examples of these actors were: the president and vice-president of URAC (*Union des Radios Communautaires du Sénégal*), members of *AfricTivistes* involved in the program “Migration Dialogue”, Professor Paphe Sakho from the Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, and dancer, choreographer, and producer Fatou Cisse. I also gained a good grasp of the studied topic, as I interviewed a migration specialist and the executive director of DIADEM (M. Badara Ndiaye), which is a Senegalese civil society organisation that works on the rights of “migrants”. This was also my internship organisation and was therefore part of my ethnographic terrain, where I also had regular discussions with M. Ndiaye about my encounters in the field. He has been in the field for over twenty years and has worked for, including for ECOWAS (The Economic Community of West African States). This makes him a very knowledgeable person within the field on “migration” in Senegal, the wider region of West-Africa and EU-AU relations.

Whose Stories?

As this research focuses on the ideas, experiences, and emotions reflected in stories, it is important to present an overview of the people telling these stories. *Table 1* gives an overview, with the name of the artist or art group, the genre of their art, the name of the relevant artistic practice, the approach to collecting their stories, and finally, some personal information about the artists (their nationality, region of origin, and their age).

Table 1: Who's Stories?

Name of Artist/Art group	Linked to organisation:	Genre	Name of Artwork(s)	Approach & Collected primary sources	Nationality	Age
Senny Camara	N/A	Performing Art: Music (Afro/Folk/Blues/Jazz)	Song: <i>Dialé</i>	Ethnography: Notes on concert & lyrics of song	Senegalese (based in-between France/Senegal)	N/A
Bët	<i>Espace jeunes de Wakhinane</i>	Performing Art: Theatre	Untitled: performance on "clandestine migration"	Ethnography: Notes on participant observation	N/A (based in Guédiawaye, Dakar)	N/A
Fadaline	<i>Centre Culturel régional de Dakar Blaise Senghor</i>	Performing Art: Music (Afro-Mandingue)	<i>L'immigration</i>	In-depth interview and song	Senegal (based in Dakar, but from Tanaff in the Casamance)	31
Eva Diallo	N/A	Visual Art: Photography	<i>Bolol</i>	Online visual ethnography & in-depth interview: photo series of exhibition as presented on social media & website	Senegalese/Swiss (based in Dakar)	26
Mya Sen	<i>Le Réseau International Diaspora En Lign</i>	Performing Art: Music (Afrosoul)	Untitled (two songs to be released)	In-depth interview	Senegalese (from Kaolack but based in Guédiawaye, Dakar)	24
Baba Diedhiou	<i>Centre Culturel régional de Dakar Blaise Senghor</i>	Visual Art: Documentary & Photography	Documentary: Bataaxal; Photo series: <i>Identité</i> (Identity)	Visual ethnography & in-depth interview: notes on documentary documentary	Senegalese (based in Dakar; but originally from the Casamance)	32
Zeinixx	<i>Africulturban Association</i>	Graffiti artist, (rapper, slam artist, singer)	Graffiti series	In-depth interview	Senegalese (based in Dakar)	33
Big Makhou Djolof	<i>Keur Ndaw Yi</i>	Performing Art: Music (Rap)	Album: <i>Le message du migrant</i> ; Documentary &	Ethnography: Field work notes to Linguère (2 days), including in-depth interview & lyrics from album	Senegalese (production of album in Dakar; based in hometown of Linguère)	N/A

Analysing Stories

My fieldwork has resulted in a variety of primary sources, including in-depth interviews, notes and texts of performing- and visual arts practices. The main challenge was on how to process and present my findings in a coherent written and visual essay. As mentioned in the introduction, I decided to organise my findings in a narrative format along the lines of an artwork: that is, the documentary *Bataaxal* by

Baba Diedhiou. I have chosen this storyline in order to make the topic more tangible and to create “climatic and dramatic moments within the essay” (Heng, 2020: 6), but also to achieve greater depth in my analysis. I hoped this would allow me to achieve thicker descriptions, make connections between various forms of art, and establish relationships with theoretical insights. As a result, I began with a thorough analysis of the documentary, where I made use memo-writing in Atlas.ti. The notes from my documentary memo-writing were then transformed into a multimedia production,² which informed the rest of my analysis. I divided the storyline of the documentary into four chapters, which I consider as markers of different scenes and also addressed different themes. As I had no experience with film or visual analysis, I used Mikos’ (2013) five-levels of film analysis as a guide. He recommends paying attention to the following elements: first, content and representation; second, narration and dramaturgy; third, characters and actors; fourth, aesthetics and configuration; and fifth, contexts. My analysis therefore began by paying close attention to these levels in every scene of the film, which was then followed by a discussion with other findings and theories. In the end, I mainly drew my thoughts from memo-writing as this captured my ideas, interpretations, and other personal thoughts.

How I Impacted the Study

As a viewer and interpreter of art, I have been deeply involved in the production of meaning in this story. There are some key ways in which I have influenced the study. Initially, I had planned to tap into artistic stories primarily as a visual ethnographer by using methods such as photography and interviews. However, the reality turned out to be somewhat different, which is also something important to take as a common thread through my story: namely, I was confronted more than I was expecting with my own role as a young white female European (often considered as French) researcher. A constant question that has crossed my mind is that of what I have the right to ask, do and how to address particular topics, and moreover, how I influence those answers. When conducting research this has to do with how you navigate your own positionality and research ethics.

In any field, but especially in the field of “migration” and African studies, this is something you *must* be aware of and ponder upon. Both fields stem from, among other things, the production of knowledge through asymmetrical relations and the act of subjugation (Connell, 2018: 399; Pisarevskaya et al., 2020). Due to my background, I have inevitably internalised a Eurocentric perspective. In particular, I encountered this during interviews regarding my critique of the European-related activities on “migration” policies and practices. I also sensed a certain fatigue with researchers in Dakar. As a result, I realised that my priority was to learn their national language (Wolof), to talk to people, to show that there was common ground and build bridges rather than photographing, analyse them, and leave. In this sense, my focus shifted from the art as being central, to becoming more of an entry point for my

² See link *Supplementary Material* (p.62)

research. From that point on the artist and their works were both equally important. After all, some of the artists also mentioned this as one of the main goals of their work: namely, pushing people to reflect and start discussions.

As noted above, the stories I witnessed were less “radical” than I expected because the artists primary concern was to warn of the deaths that occur on the maritime coastal and trans-Saharan routes, instead of, for example, reflecting on who is responsible for the killings. This meant a shift in focus from activist-art to simply considering art as embodying stories. The artists’ focus further meant that my primary thought of finding “migration” stories that would address multiple types of “migration”, e.g., internal, regional, and international, eventually led to most narratives focusing on international movements that addressed South-North “migration”, with a particular focus on maritime routes and trans-Saharan pathways.

Another element that guided my research was the concern for my own safety, but even more so for the safety of the artists. During the second half of my fieldwork, there were occasional moments of political unrest related to the sentencing of opposition candidate Ousmane Sonko. However, these moments of unrest were relatively easy to manage as my research placement organisation did an excellent job of explaining the situation and giving advice on when to stay at home. On these days I therefore did not ask to meet participants or organise any activities. Nonetheless, I was more concerned about the criminalisation of solidarity: in 2021, for example, the president of the NGO *Horizon sans frontière* was arrested for comments he made about the use of funds allocated by the European Union to Senegal to fight “illegal migration” (Jeune Afrique, 2021). Cases such as these are the *exception* rather than the rule. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware of such potential consequences and to think about the impact that statements could have in the future. I therefore took care not to ask questions that were more critical than the boundaries that had been established between the interviewee and myself.

The final factors that have influenced my work, but certainly not the least important, are issues of interpretation and analysis of this work. In interpreting and analysing I have, of course, worked from my own framework of knowledge. These have been shaped by my own disciplinary background (human geography and sociology), by my upbringing in several European countries (Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands), and also by what I learned at home from my family. All these experiences have shaped my view on freedom of movement: that is, “migration” should not be a privilege, but a human right. I have dealt with this issue by changing the direction of this research (away from “critical art”) and, moreover, by putting my thoughts in conversation with my encounters rather than suppressing them. The question of language also posed a challenge to the interpretation of my work. Translating songs from Wolof into French or English can be very tricky, as literal translations of expressions are not possible. This has to do with the fact that the use of certain words or phrases and their meaning is very

contextual. Fortunately, I had an interpreter who not only translated the songs, but also interpreted them. This is noted in the relevant fragments of my analysis. As this thesis is written in English, all interview fragments have been translated into English, but the original language (French) can be found in the footnotes.

Exploring Senegalese Art about “Migration”

The analysis follows the storyline of the documentary *Bataaxal* and is structured into four parts. Each chapter consists of, first, an analysis of the documentary (including a multimedia production on each chapter),³ and second, transitions into a discussion with other findings from other artists’ and their artistic practices. The first part of the documentary delves into what is made accessible to the senses through the artistic experience: in other words, into the aesthetics of art (Rancière, 2004).⁴ This analysis is interested in unfolding the aesthetical strategies deployed by the documentary maker, followed by a discussion of those strategies taken by other artists. I furthermore explain what they in my opinion manage to achieve through their aesthetics: on the one hand, it helps to construct feelings and emotions, and on the other hand, it helps to communicate their messages. I thus specifically focus on the role of aesthetics and politics within artistic productions. The second part of the documentary conversely attempts to stay close to the words and messages that the narrators convey in their stories. It focuses on the lived experiences of “migration” that they recount through the flows of events that they narrate. The aim is to show the role of memories, emotions, words and phrases in the shaping of meaning. The third part then turns to the broader thematic focuses that are covered by artists and their works, such as the role of kinship, gender, labour/economics, classism/elitism, race and the politics of borders and “migration” policies, and finally, religion. The last section is in contrast concerned with how the artist’s environment has shaped their artistic practices. As a result, I try to illustrate the spatial and temporal entanglement of their artistic practices.

Setting the Scene

The filmmaker, who goes under the stage name Baba Diedhiou, is a photographer, video artist and professor of advertising and graphic design at the National School of Fine Arts in Dakar (ENBA). Baba Diedhiou was born in 1991 in *Silinkine*, a village in the Casamance southern region of Senegal. He began his career as a young professional footballer, where he was given the opportunity to travel to Italy for a test to continue his international career. However, he was involved in a serious accident that left him hospitalised for several months. As a result, his footballing career came to an abrupt halt. He eventually turned to his other passion: photography. Starting from nothing but his passion, he has now achieved several national and international solo and group exhibitions. His work touches on several social issues, including “migration”. The documentary *Bataaxal* is an example of this. In this short eight-minute film, released in 2020, Baba Diedhiou raises awareness of the dangers of “irregular migration” and expresses his dissatisfaction with the authorities responsible for the unequal mobility opportunities of African youth compared to the rest of the world’s youth.

³ See *Supplementary Material* (p.62)

⁴ See *Approach* (p.7)

[Part I] The Aesthetical Strategies of Art [00:15 – 02:17]⁵



Still 1. Screenshot of opening scene in “Bataaxal”: Close-up shot of waves

In the opening scene, I am drawn in by a close-up shot of seawater crashing against the ocean rocks. I hear the sound of water. The visuals are all in a greyish tone, creating a neutral but slightly dark and melancholic atmosphere. As a viewer, my eyes and mind are mainly captured by the movement of the water. After a while, I spot a piece of rubbish floating in the sea. I then see it’s actually a piece of paper - it is actually a letter. The screen then goes black, the soundtrack of the documentary starts, and the title “BATAAXAL” appears on the screen. This word means letter in Wolof. After this interlude, the second half of the introduction starts with a wide shot of the sky, as the sun is slowly setting. The music continues and at the same time I start to hear the very familiar and comforting sound of children playing in a neighbourhood. It’s the typical sounds of children playing that you hear all over in the world. Wider shots of the sea follow; subsequently, of an island, fisher boats, known in Senegal as “pirogues”. Then the documentary returns to several wide-shots of the beach and ocean, and finally, it switches to close up shots of the waves crashing against the beach again. As a spectator, I am once again hypnotized by the movement of the ocean water and its waves.

Memo writing by Hannah Kay, May 2023, Amsterdam



Still 2. Screenshot of the opening scene in “Bataaxal”: Wide shot of the beach, ocean, and “pirogues”

⁵ This introduction is accompanied by *Part I* of the multimedia production [00:15-02:17]

Throughout the opening scene, narration is entirely absent, and the atmosphere of the film is set by its dramaturgy (visual storytelling) and aesthetics (Mikos, 2013: 11- 14). The former is related to the sequence of the shots, which builds up by alternating between close-up shots of the ocean and its natural elements, such as waves and rocks, and wider shots of the beach, including “pirogues” and people, and finally, back to images of waves. This sequence of shots prompts the curiosity of the audience, but also makes them understand the darkness of what is to come. The latter refers rather to the stylistic means, such as the changing colour tones: from more greyish tones at the beginning and end, to the warmer colours of the sunset in the middle. Sounds also play an important role, moving from the sounds of crashing waves to the soundtrack of the film, which includes a rhythmic and drumming sound, the sounds of children playing, and finally returning to ocean noises. These technical elements create tension and spark curiosity to watch the documentary and set the pace of the film. Also, as a viewer, I realise that the beginning of a story is being told. This story is set through the atmosphere of the opening scene, which is enabled by the aesthetics of art (Rancière, 2004); in particular, Baba Diedhiou uses visual storytelling and other stylistic elements, such as the use of a soundtrack. This aesthetic experience presents the reality that is being constructed by the artist (Rancière, 2004). What the story beings to tell is, on the one hand, it contains a particular feeling of sombreness, whilst on the other hand, a certain mundaneness. These two themes are also present in the stories of other artists and are represented in different ways through their aesthetic elements. I present two examples of artists who do this in different ways: one artist stimulates reflection through abstraction, while the other plays with mainstream notions of “migration”.



Figure 3. Senny Camara’s concert at the French Institute in Dakar, 19 January 2023 (Photo by Hannah Kay)

Playing with Abstraction

Like Baba Diedhiou, Senny Camara is one of those artists who manifests her story through the visual and musical aesthetics of art. Senny Camara is a Senegalese Afro, folk, blues and jazz, singer, and musician, who is currently lives inbetween Senegal and France. At the end of January 2023, I attended her kora concert at the French Institute in Dakar, where she performed her album *Unité* (“Unity” in English). Before the concert, I was familiar with her song *Dialé*, in which Senny Camara pays homage to the victims of the ocean. As she explains to the audience, *Dialé* means “to be sorry or deeply saddened by something” in Wolof. During her concert, she decided to accompany the performance of this song with live art by her friend and painter Gerard Gabayen (see *Figure 3*). The painting that was created during the song was an abstract depiction of the ocean, a boat and probably people. It was not entirely clear to me what the painting was about, but I followed the movement of the simple thick black lines that were being drawn across the canvas. I think the abstract way in which this was presented was symbolic, as it encouraged the audience to think about the issue without presenting them with shocking images of the kind they would encounter in the mainstream media. As a significant proportion of the audience were non-Wolof speakers and French or other European citizens, I suspect this was also a method of engaging those listeners who did not understand the lyrics of the song. Another aesthetic element added during this performance was the reproduction of the sound of water by one of the musicians. This was reproduced with water being poured in and out of a basin (see *Figure 3*, right back). This meant that the sound of the ocean was constantly present as the audience listened to Senny Camara’s kora performance.

Playing with Imaginaries

Eva Diallo, a Swiss-Senegalese visual artist based in Dakar, also uses sets the scene through visual elements in her documentary series. On the one hand, by presenting close-ups of objects and natural elements encountered on *the* “journey”, and on the other, by presenting her project *Bolool*⁶ as a documentary photo series. The first method is similar to that of Baba Diedhiou, in which she includes elements of everydayness, such as that of car tyres and of pebbles in a riverbed (see *Fieldwork Notes 1 & Figure 3*). With the second method, she presents the journey of people on the move as a sequence of encounters: in other words, presenting the photos as a series illustrates “migration” as something continuous, withholding mundane activities such as making phone calls, sitting down and swimming (see *idem*). In my view, her photography thus presents mobility in a way that is at odds with how people on the move are usually portrayed in mainstream photography on the subject. Rather than presenting ‘threatening’ and generalising images of “migrants”, she succeeds in subjectively challenging people’s ideas about people on the move. In doing so, it humanises them without romanticizing mobility by showing the everyday things that people observe and encounter on their journeys. In a nutshell, this

⁶ Translated from Pulaar by Eva Diallo as “*la route du voyage*” in French, or “the journey” in English.

series of photographs plays with my imagination: it plays with the different associations one has with travel and “migration”, and ultimately merges them into one of mobility.

When I look at her work, I see objects like old car tyres, a bucket, cars and so on. These objects are either in use or abandoned. I also see a lot of natural elements, such as a bed of water covered with pebbles, which is probably a close-up of a riverbed/stream. Other natural elements are photographs of landscapes, such as those taken from an aeroplane. Conversely, these photographs are taken from a distance and therefore show a wide landscape. Different depths are therefore included in her work. There are also elements of movement, as people walk, travel, take calls or swim, but also of people resting, sitting and staying put. Different emotions can be seen in the documentary series as people laugh, pose for a family photo or reflect. Another observation is that all the tones are quite neutral. This is due to the earthy tones given by the sand and dust from the natural environment. As a result, this gives the photo series a neutral feeling: it does not show the journey as something overly positive or negative (this is also what Eva mentions in our conversation).

Fieldwork Note 1 by Hannah Kay, March 2023, Dakar

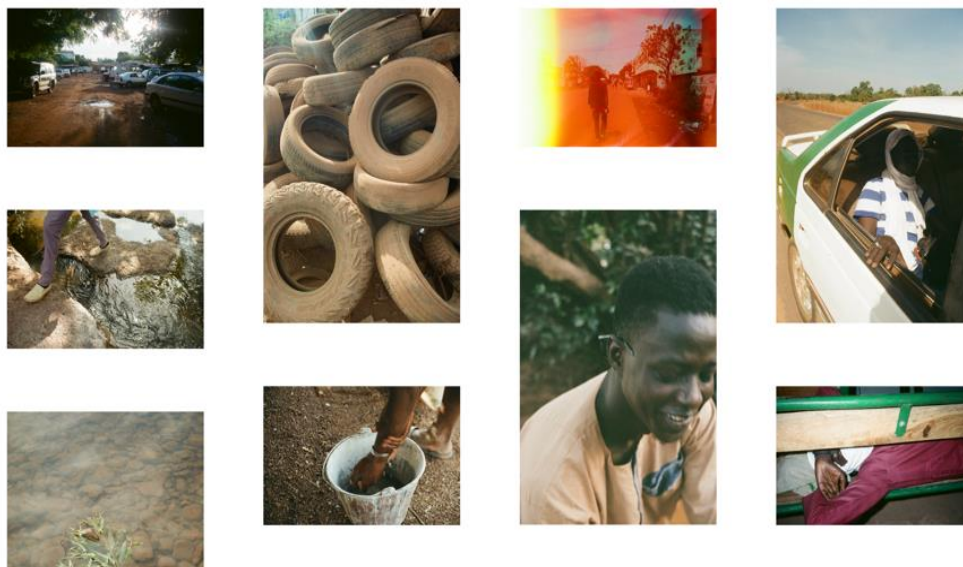


Figure 3: Screenshot from Eva Diallo’s website of her photo series *Bolool*

The above examples therefore use primarily visual, but also musical, aesthetic strategies to tell their stories. These artists thus *construct* stories through the senses (Rancière, 2015). Other artists also employ aesthetic strategies; they however use these to *materialise* their stories instead of fabricating them through a particular aesthetic approach. This relates back my previous definition of aesthetics as relating “to the construction, perceiving, and materialisation of meaning through the senses” (Rancière,

2015).⁷ Fadaline, for example, sings in Mandingue. Mandingue is one of the Manding languages spoken in southern Senegal, Gambia, and Mali. In his song *L'immigration*, he warns of the dangers of irregular migration, based on his own experience of “migration” and that of his friends.⁸ This message is addressed to his fellow youths in Tanaff and the Southern Casamance region. To ensure that his story is heard and understood in his community, he sings in the Mandingue language and the Afro-Mandingue music genre. Another example is the artist BMD, who tells a similar story to Fadaline in his album *Message du Migrant*. He addresses his message locally, to his hometown of Linguère, by rapping in Wolof, but he also has the ambition to spread his message across other borders and frontiers to reach different communities.⁹ In order to have a more transnational reach, BMD also sings in French on his current album. He also mentions that he has ambitions to release songs in English one day to expand his reach in non-French speaking countries.¹⁰ A final example is Zeinixx, the first female Senegalese graffiti artist (and slam poet), who has been active since 2008. She explains that her murals are always accompanied by a very specific message, as she tries to raise awareness of certain phenomena. This often takes the form of a phrase in the language of the target group (usually Wolof), which is then translated into other languages of the region and disseminated via hashtags.¹¹ These examples thus illustrate how the aesthetic strategies of these artists are less related to the construction of the stories they tell, such as those of Baba Diedhiou, Eva Diallo and Senny Camara, but rather to the perception and materialisation of their stories.

The Alignment of Aesthetics with Artists’ Goals

The described artists’ aesthetic choices can accordingly be brought into relation with the role of art and the artists’ motivations. I distinguish three types of roles, which I have formulated these under the labels of “steering courses of action”, “reinventing imaginaries” and “stopping and thinking”. It should be noted, however, that these are not mutually exclusive and certainly overlap as every artist ultimately engages in all three processes. For analytical purposes, however, it can help to show how aesthetic choices within the arts are not made solely in terms of expressing beauty, but, conversely, are established in relation to the artists’ ideas and feelings, and thus the role of their artwork.

⁷ See Chapter “Approach” (p.5)

⁸ “Ok, but there, the song there, it’s just... I did it to raise awareness among my friends, young people, especially young people, yes, to tell them that immigration, as you said so well, it’s good to emigrate (...) But you must emigrate in a way of own means, on a regular basis. Yes, but not irregularly. You see, we must emigrate on a regular basis.” (Interview with Fadaline, 27 February 2023, Dakar)

⁹ “I have a message and it’s the message of the migrant. My message will migrate to different continents” (Lyrics from the song” (*Message du Migrant* by BMD)

¹⁰ “And I’m even considering doing an English song so that those who don’t understand can do it too, so they can hear it, to better understand what I’m saying” (Interview with BMD, 7 March 2023, Dakar)

¹¹ “It depends on the target; it depends on the area. Yes, and then when we write a message in Wolof, we always translate this message” (Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar)

“Steering courses of action” refers, first off, to the way in which aesthetics in art coincides with the artists’ desire to guide people down a specific pathway. I place the artists and artworks of Zeinixx, BMD, and Fadaline under this label. As mentioned above, they address their target audience using specific aesthetic strategies that ensure that their stories are perceived and materialised. They are most closely related to the approaches of “cultural activists” (Firat & Kuryel, 2011) and “activist-artist” (Duncombe, 2016), who in their own ways aim to disrupt and reorient public and political discourses using art. These two approaches differ in the sense that the former is more specifically concerned with creative tactics that combine elements of irony (Firat & Kuryel, 2011). Both approaches have their own ideas about the intermingling of aesthetics and politics, but both point to the fact that art should be analysed as having a *social function*. The social function of the mentioned artists is in this case to reshape public discourse by explaining that there are “regular” routes that do not involve the risks and dangers of “irregular migration”. The artists therefore try to dissuade young people from emigrating by explaining that there are equal opportunities in Senegal. In other words, emigration is not the only option; staying in Senegal and being successful is also an option. This is also a message that can be seen on murals around the city (see *Figure 4*). It is important to note, however, that none of these artists have any desire to tell people what to do, but rather see it as their responsibility to “raise awareness” among young people.¹² As a result, I argue that the interventionist strategy adopted by Zeinixx and BMD, channelled through their aesthetic choices, is a tactic to attract attention. Their artistic productions are regularly accompanied by other activities, such as information sessions combined with cultural or entrepreneurial activities that take place together with the target group.¹³

¹²“Because often, we, in raising awareness, the problem is to go and say don't leave. So, I'm in no position to say don't leave when I talk all the time. There, I'm back from a trip and I'm about to go on another trip before the end of the week. So, who am I to tell people don't go? (Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar)

¹³ “But therefore, raising awareness comes with training, with concrete examples.” (Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar); “We train the children on that. Yes, but we also go to agencies that train state programs in Senegal.” (Interview with BMD, 7 March 2023, Dakar)



Figure 4: Picture of a mural taken in Mermoz, Dakar outside the German Agency for International Cooperation [GIZ] (Photo by Hannah Kay)

The second label, “reinventing imaginaries”, is conversely mirrored in the work of Eva Diallo. The aesthetic approach to her work described above, among other things, reimagines a new narrative of “migration” that also creates a new way of thinking about the journeys of people on the move. What she presents is different from the dominant discourse, as she shows “migration” in a more neutral way, illustrating it as containing moments of joy, moments of hardship, and mundane transactions and encounters in various places such as bus and train stations.¹⁴ Her series of photographs also has a mixture of stylistic elements that relates to the work of *artists* (Anzaldúa, 2004): she has a mixture of personal and historical elements in her visual narrative,¹⁵ and she also includes poetry or small fragments of interviews in her photographic work.¹⁶

The third label, “stopping and thinking”, is one in which aesthetics brings you into a state of “deep thought” and reflection. This relates to one of the functions of art described by Rancière (2015), who explains that “art should also allow us to be absorbed in our thoughts, to distance ourselves, and have a moment of rest”. Senny Camara and Baba Diedhiou both have some of these subjective moments in their performance and documentary that allows the mind to distance itself and be absorbed in thoughts: the former, in relation to the live painting, and the latter, in the close-up shots of the waves in the film’s introduction. Both transform your mindset to stop and take a moment of reflection. What to reflect upon

¹⁴ “*En fait à tout, le chemin est très long et du coup c’est de montrer quelque chose qui est un peu plus neutre. C’est pas quelque chose de très dur, c’est pas quelque chose de très joyeux, mais c’est juste un peu pour moi la réalité de la vie quotidienne dans ces pays-là, et des transactions, des gares routières, des bus, des moyens de transport, etc.*” (Interview with Eva Diallo, 14 February 2023)

¹⁵ “*Le premier chapitre est lié à ma famille, surtout dans le nord du Sénégal. Et celui-là parle beaucoup de tout ce qu’ils ont laissé derrière eux en partant. Et c’était une manière aussi de pouvoir avoir une base quelque part. C’est important de montrer la source aussi et le contexte dans lequel les gens vivent avant de vouloir partir. Et après, les autres étapes se sont créées après coup, de différentes manières.*” (Interview with Eva Diallo, 14 February 2023)

¹⁶ See Eva Diallo’s website: <https://eva-diallo.com/bolol-1/>.

then arises from the content of the artworks: i.e., through the words of the music or the narrators in the film. The aesthetics in these cases hence bring the audience into focus to prepare them for what has to come.

What this discussion of the relationship between the role and aesthetics of art also illustrates is how the aesthetics and politics of art are deeply intertwined.¹⁷ It shows how artists' political values are reflected through their aesthetic reasoning: in other words, they guide the audience in what and how to think about a particular issue by choosing what the audience hears and sees. By presenting "the visible and the thinkable" (Rancière, 2003: 203), they thus expose their own ideas and feelings about a particular social reality. As a result, the artists and their works play a formative role in the constitution of the 'migration' situation. The overarching theme that runs through all the narratives is that 'migration' is presented as a phenomenon at the crossroads of melancholy and the mundane. As demonstrated in the introduction to this chapter through the work of Baba Diedhiou, other artists also demonstrate this through the feeling they portray in their aesthetics. In the following chapters, I will explore other insights into the "migration" situation that become visible when looking at other stories told through art.

¹⁷ See *Approach* (p.5)

[Part II] The Narrators and their Lived Experiences of “Migration” [02:18-04:42]¹⁸

The following scene begins with dark visual shots of the sea. It seems to me that night has fallen. I think I see people swimming in the dark ocean, but then, I realise that it could also be people drowning in the water. It is unclear. The narrators, all men but one woman, begin simultaneously to speak poetically about the voyage and the deaths that occur at sea. They speak different languages, including Wolof, Pulaar, Arabic, Kituba, Lingala and Darija. They recount the following:

*Shouts were coming from everywhere,
a dark night,
a terrible night, a dreadful night,
a sadly perilous night,
a night like no other,
oh my god what have I done,
only the dead can explain,
no branch, no life jacket, no hope to hold on to.
Save me to the rescue.*

*Before they give up their last deaf breaths that could be heard in the den of the Atlantic
Ocean that was swallowing them by the dozens.
Help me! (woman’s voice)*

This scene comes to an end as the documentary makes a switch to a shot of a man in a white tank top. He is in the sea, followed by a close-up of the waves crashing against the beach, where abandoned flip flops and pieces of clothing are washed ashore. The film’s soundtrack continues throughout this scene.

Memo writing by Hannah Kay, May 2023, Amsterdam



Still 3. Shot of washed-up clothing from the documentary film “Bataaxal”

¹⁸ This introduction is accompanied by *Part II* of the multimedia production [02:18-04:42]

After the introduction, the film begins on a darker note, as it portrays close-up images of the ocean water in the middle of the night, showing possible drownings and lost objects, such as clothes and flipflops, floating in the Atlantic. The way Baba Diedhiou chooses to introduce the “migrant” story, or in this case the “migrant” tragedies, is important. The way he introduces the flow of events and gives them meaning tells a particular story and provides particular insights.

The film is particularly gloomy and dramatic by the colouring of the images and the subjective visualisation of the scene. The choice to present this series of subjective images, as opposed to the shocking and sensational images commonly shown in the mainstream media,¹⁹ means that the viewer's attention is drawn to what is being said. This is also the case when the narration is introduced; in this section he uses poetry as a form of narration. It is powerful because of this subjective visual storytelling that I described earlier. As a result, the various narrators draw you into the story being told.

The theme of the poem relates to “irregular” boat “migration” across the Atlantic. Each narrator describes in a single sentence a personal emotion or experience of a difficult moment at sea. These memories and personal accounts thus form a story (Chang, 2014: 16). The story is constructed through the narrated memories, which, like the dramaturgy, create a dark atmosphere and contain descriptions of *the* horrific night at sea (e.g., “a terrible night”), cries for help (e.g., “shouts” and “save me to the rescue”), and finally, of the large number of people perished at sea (e.g., “in the den of the Atlantic Ocean that was swallowing them by the dozens”). The language used to create the “migrant” tragedy of some people's journeys is related to the fact that the documentary is addressed, among others, to those who might be thinking of making this dangerous journey. As Baba Diedhiou explains, he tries to show that this path is *uncertain*: “(...) and show young people that this adventure is uncertain” and “show them that this is not at all the right path”. The story is also made more realistic by the fact that it is told by people who have experienced “migration”. The way this narration is done in different languages and voices also means that the listener can potentially identify with the people telling the story. It also makes the story more human and shows how the struggle for mobility is linked to all African youth, not just the Senegalese. As the filmmaker explains:

¹⁹ It is important to note that it isn't just European media involved in the creating of myths in their publications, but also many African media platforms are implicated in this. This is something that AfricTivistes, an African civil society organisation, is trying to combat with their platform *Dialogue Migration*: <https://dialoguemigration.com/en/about-us>.

In fact, it's a way of saying that it's not just Senegalese youth who is dead, but the whole of Africa that is dying. So, you see, it's these young people who died at sea and all that (...) And everyone shows us these moments that are very difficult during the passage.²⁰

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

The filmmaker's narrative choices are therefore linked to the meaning he or she wishes to attach to the lived experience of "migration". With the exception of one artist (Mya Sen), the narrators all have a lived experience or attempt at international "migration", either through "irregular" or "regular" channels. Through these personal accounts, they express their own thoughts, feelings, and emotions about "migration". Making sense of these memories and personal experiences is important to showcase the complexity of every story: that is, highlighting how every story is individual and contains agency but simultaneously is part of a complex history (Chang, 2014). This chapter continues to deal with the former point, whilst the next chapter delves into the latter. To demonstrate this lived experience and the role of the narrator, I first zoom into two examples, i.e., one of a "returnee" and the other of a "regular migrant". In both the cases the artists are the main protagonists in their songs. Then, I turn to two meanings that are channelled by several artists that are important for understanding how they feel and see the "migrant" situation: namely, how they mourn their "warriors" and how they look at Senegal and the whole African continent with an enormous sense of pride.

The "Returnee"

The first example concerns the artist BMD. As well as being an artist, he is also a "return migrant" who reached Libya via the Sahara. He returned "voluntarily" to Senegal with the help of the IOM after being detained in Libya. "Return" is the second most important axis of the international cooperation discourse, alongside the first, which focuses on "irregular migration".²¹ However, the concept of "Assisted Voluntary Return" has been criticized and alternatives, such as "soft deportation", have been proposed instead (Leerkes, Os & Boersema, 2017); because how "voluntary" is the return of someone who has suffered and witnessed violence and death? In the first song of his album, BMD talks about these experiences:

²⁰ Original quote: "*En fait, c'est une façon de dire que ce n'est pas seulement la jeunesse sénégalaise qui est morte, mais en fait c'est toute l'Afrique qui est morte. Donc tu vois, ce sont ces jeunes qui sont morts à la mer et tout, (...) Et chacun nous montre ces moments qui sont très difficiles pendant le passage.*" (Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar)

²¹ "There is a narrative that is global where the axes of bilateral and multilateral cooperation predominate. (...) in particular irregular migration and the question of return migration, that is really the dominant discourse, it is the discourse of cooperation." (Interview with M. Ndiaye, 20 April 2023)

<i>Message du migrant</i>	Message from a migrant
<i>Moi migrant, moi qui a vécu beaucoup de dangers de la migration irrégulière, des arnaques, des massacres, des tortures, soit enfin emprisonnements, viols du calvaires.</i>	I, a migrant, have experienced many of the dangers of irregular migration, scams, massacres, torture, imprisonment, rape, ordeals.
<i>J'ai un message et c'est le message du migrant.</i>	I have a message and it's the migrant's message.

Lyrics from *Message du migrant* by BMD (2022), translation and interpretation by Hannah Kay, June 2023

He recounts these traumatic events in his second song *Mon histoire*. BMD adds that the smuggler put them in a great deal of danger by lying that it was “paradise” over there. As a result, he saw “young Africans, kidnapped, tortured, massacred, imprisoned” and the sexual abuse of women (“I have seen girls raped”). All these events hurt him, as well as the whole continent “as Mama Africa continuous to cry”.²² In *Wagnekouna*, the third song on his album, he continues to talk about the personal loss he must deal with on his journey. He immediately begins by saying that journey “is not worth it”,²³ which he repeats throughout the chorus of the song. Other ways of describing the journey are that he calls it “suicide”²⁴ and that he does not want to hear about people migrating, nor will he ever try to go back to Europe, even if someone would pay him.²⁵ In the song *Ñibissi*, on the other hand, he talks about returning home. He describes to his parents how the journey overseas was not what he expected:²⁶ he slept in gardens, under bridges and ate from rubbish:

<i>Fanaan ci jardins yi</i>	Sleeping in gardens
<i>Taw bi sama kaw ba betsek</i>	
<i>Fanaan ci suuf pont yi</i>	Sleeping under bridges
<i>Lu ne ma nan ma fadal</i>	
<i>Lekk ci mbaliet yi</i>	Eating from the trash

Lyrics from *Ñibissi* by BMD (2022), translation and interpretation by Khady Postma, June 2023

In these examples he describes vividly *what* he saw, *how* he lived and felt about the “migrant” situation. He talks about how his experiences in Senegal were hard, but what he experienced outside was even worse, and how he currently feels about this situation. BMD also talks about the courage that he came

²² “*Maman Afrika continue de verser ces larmes*”, from the song *Mon histoire* by BMD (2022).

²³ “*Diaaraatoutouko*”, from the song *Wagnekouna* by BMD (2022).

²⁴ “*Xarouma*”, from the song *Wagnekouna* by BMD (2022).

²⁵ “*Dotouma degg yoonu suuf geej ba delusi*”, from the song *Wagnekouna* by BMD (2022).

²⁶ “*Ndax bitim rew lima fi foogone amoul fi*”, from the song *Ñibissi* by BMD (2022).

back with and the realisation that you can have a meaningful life at home in Senegal, where he currently lives. He particularly expands on this in the last song of his album when he repeats:

Do tekki fi Why not succeed here
Waw mën nekk Yes it is possible
Do rekki sa reew Why not succeed in your home country
Waw waw mën nekk Yes, yes it is possible

Lyrics from *Gnoko doundou* by BMD (2022), translation and interpretation by Khady Postma, June 2023

The story he constructs and the way he tells it is heavily based on his own memories and perceptions of what he has been through and his current life. His narrative is therefore addressed to people like *him*, those who are considering taking the trans-Saharan “migration” route. In a way, he is singing to his old self, to the oblivious and innocent young man who did not know any better and consequently experienced hardship.

The “Regular Migrant”

The second example, Senny Camara, also speaks from experiences. As someone who has had the opportunity to travel regularly, this results in a different approach to the phenomenon. In the first half of the song *Dialé*, the singer-songwriter expresses her condolences for the lives lost at sea. She sings of the many “dead”, including children, that now “dwell in the ocean”. In an interview, she explains how, as a mother, she sees young people who are supposed to be the future of society, who end up imprisoned or lost at sea.²⁷ To pay tribute to these victims, she lists the names of those who have passed away:

Ablaye Niang, Sileyman Danso, Samuel Otoru
Nuru dumbia, Fatoumata Silla, Oumar Diallo
Nawel Sabibi, Faysal Imran, Alian Kurdy

Lyrics from the song *Dialé* by Senny Camara (2020)

She furthermore sings about how people are “bullied”, “isolated”, and “oppressed” by various governments and their institutions. At the end of the song, Senny Camara is joined by another artist (Sym Sam) who slams in English:

²⁷ See REMWI for the whole interview, last accessed 14 July 2023: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/22931/europe-has-turned-mediterranean-into-migrant-graveyard-ngo-president-claims>

Let's go back to humanity, treat each other,
Behave towards each other, as humans.
Stop killing each other, stop mistreating people.
Stop chasing those looking for help.
Colour, race, country, wherever you come from, you're still human.
You're no different from me, no different from them, you're no different from anyone else,
for as long as you breathe, you're one like me.

Lyrics from *Dialé* by Senny Camara (2020)

The end of the song is therefore addressed to people all over the world. This is made clear by the choice of language (i.e., English), but also by the call to “going back to humanity” and “stop chasing those looking for help”. Here, Senny Camara refers to the operations coordinated by Frontex involving “pushbacks” at sea (Tondo, 2021), and to the extra-territorial partnership agreements between EU member states (Palm, 2020), for examples with Libya or very recently the EU migration deal with Tunisia (Amnesty International, 2023). In both situations, people are obstructed in their right to move by the excessive use of force and violence. As a result, they are “pushed back” to countries where they risk persecution and further human rights abuses, in violation of international and European humanitarian and human rights law. However, the singer takes her argument beyond conventions as her album “Unity” questions how we can live in a shared world, but why can't we do so peacefully? She points out that everyone is equal, as the slammer at the end of her song says: “for as long as you breathe, you're one like me”.

Unlike BMD, Senny Camara does not necessarily speak to the “migrants” about whether and how to move, but instead points to the institutions and people responsible for the loss of life and who force people to move in certain ways. The story she tells is therefore directed at both her home country and the international community; it is a story full of grief and frustration. The song is therefore a form of therapy to digest the lived emotions that she shares with other mothers and families.

The Mourning of “Warriors”

All the stories being told contain a feeling or emotion that expresses loss, melancholy, or grief. This also illustrates the focus of most of the stories: namely “irregular migration” in relation to the maritime and trans-Saharan “migration” routes. It should be noted, however, that the mourning of these “migrants” avoids their victimisation. They are not blamed for making ignorant decision, but rather, they are referred to as “warriors”. For instance, BMD describes “migrants” as “warriors looking for

scraps”.²⁸ In this case, he is referring to those people whose journeys get “darker and darker” with each day passing,²⁹ but who still get up and keep going, despite the loss of their material possessions, friends, and potentially their sense of self. Fadaline also speaks of “migrants” as “warriors”, because they are the people who feel a certain responsibility to provide for their families, and therefore risk everything for this sake:

This pushed me to pay homage to these *warriors*, to my friends there, these people.

Why do I say warrior? Because they just wanted to meet the challenges, to help their parents, their families, their sisters, their brothers. Exactly, that’s it. Because well, as you know, over there, we are over there, we drink, we eat well, we sleep well. But you know, at a certain age, you have to take responsibility. The responsibility of parents. You can’t see, every morning when you wake up, you see your parents working in the fields and you’re there, you’re doing nothing. So that’s what pushes us young people to go to Europe. Or leave Africa, what? Yes, that’s it, yes, that’s what even pushed me to sing this song there to pay tribute to my friends, to my friends, there.³⁰

Interview with Fadaline, 27 February 2023, Dakar

The meaning created by referring to “migrants” as warriors is that it gives them dignity and humanises “migrants”. They also point out that moving is something normal, something that all people do to, among other things, provide for their families and simply to explore other horizons: in other words, “not to limit oneself” (Interview with Mya Sen, 18 February 2023). This is in line with Ndiaye (2021), who notes that “migration” has always been essential for Senegalese citizens to “explore other horizons” (see next page). The ability and act of moving has therefore always been an inherent part of society.

For migrants and their families who stayed behind, migration is also a way to face the

²⁸ “*Jambaar yi dey moom wuti lañuy am*”, from the song *Mbeuk Mi* by BMD (2022).

²⁹ “*Te yoon bi di gën di lëndëm*”, from the song *Mbeuk Mi* by BMD (2022).

³⁰ Original quote: “*Cela m’a poussé à rendre hommage à ces guerriers, à mes amis là bas, ces gens là. Pourquoi je dis guerrier? Parce qu’ils voulaient juste relever les défis, aider leurs parents, leurs familles, leurs sœurs, leurs frères. Justement, c’est ça. Parce que bon, comme vous le savez, là bas, on est là bas, on boit, on mange bien, on dort bien. Mais tu sais, à un certain âge, tu dois prendre tes responsabilités. La responsabilité des parents. Tu ne peux pas voir, chaque matin, quand tu te réveilles, tu vois tes parents travailler aux champs et toi tu es là, tu ne fais rien. Donc c’est ça qui nous pousse, nous les jeunes, à partir vers l’Europe. Ou bien quitter l’Afrique, quoi? Oui, c’est ça, oui, c’est ça qui m’a poussé même de chanter cette chanson là pour rendre hommage à mes amis, à mes amis, là.*”

difficulties felt at home; a different way of being, a way to have financial resources, income, and new skills. But also, and this is something that I think is very important, it is a way to have new knowledge, because migration is both what you can obtain in terms of economic wealth and what you get in terms of social and economic development.

Interview between MMC West Africa and M. Ndiaye (2021)

Nationalist and Pan-Africanist Pride

La jeunesse africaine, African youth,
l'Afrique a besoin de nous. Africa needs us.
Restons chez nous, Let's stay at home,
mobilisons-nous pour bâtir une Afrique à nous. let us mobilize to build an Africa of our own.
(...) (...)
L'Afrique avec ses ressources. Africa with its resources.
On a de vastes terres pour l'agriculture, We have vast lands for agriculture, livestock, and
l'élevage et autres. others.
Le soleil est là. Quoi de plus pour développer The sun is out. What more to develop our dear
notre chère Afrique ? Africa?

Lyrics from *Message du migrant* by BMD (2022), translation by Hannah Kay, June 2023

As illustrated above, and through the previous examples in this chapter, the final point of this discussion relates to the way in which all artists relate the struggles over mobility to Senegal, and the African continent. They ascribe a great sense of pride to the people, the country, and the continent; they talk about the possibilities that exist because of the vast number of resources. The only obstacle is that these possibilities must be developed. In their works, therefore, they portray a large nationalist and pan-Africanist sentiment. Both sentiments are features of developments in post-colonial African states, although the latter was developed by intellectuals of African descent outside the continent. After colonial rule, many nationalist leaders in the process of creating independent states sought to create a unified identity to gain national sovereignty. The management of human mobility was one of the features of these nationalist mechanisms (Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). Pan-Africanism, on the other hand, was embraced by independence movements to create a sense of unity among Africans (and black Americans) that departed from the idea of sharing the same identity, cultural and historical experiences. The Pan-Africanist tradition has been heavily criticised for, among other things, homogenising the experiences of people of African descent (Adeleke, 1995). However, the way in which the artists express the common struggles for mobility across the African continent can be linked to this line of

thought. The artists therefore retain stories that create a sense of agency that seeks to uplift, unify, and empower both Senegal as a nation and the African continent.

Artists are not the only actors in the field reflecting pan-Africanist sentiments. CSOs, such as DIADEM, also express the need for current “migration” policies and practices to place Africa and African interests at the centre of agreements and practices. They are thus expressing an Afrocentric sentiment that is a feature of the Pan-Africanist tradition. Ndiaye (2021) explains that since the 2000s, Senegal’s “migration” management priorities have shifted because of European fears of a “migrant invasion”.³¹ Consequently, under European pressure, Senegalese policy frameworks began to shift their focus towards promoting mobility on the one hand, while also beginning to securitise their borders on the other (Kabbanji, 2011; Mouthaan, 2022). As Ndiaye (2021) further notes, partners and organisations in Senegal “followed the direction of funding and not the direction of migration dynamics”. As a result, the wishes of Senegalese and African citizens were neglected in the objectives of “migration” policies and practices. Both CSOs and artists thus empower people by giving a particular meaning to the “migrant” reality: that is, as narrators they move the narrative away from Eurocentric narratives of “migration” and express the need to re-centre this discourse towards one that benefits their own needs.

³¹ A key event that fuelled this alarmism is the Canary Islands “crisis” in 2005/2006, where an estimated 32000 “migrants” reached European territory (IOM, 2019).

[Part III] Constructing “Migration” and the “Migrant” Reality [04:42-08:40]³²

This scene begins with a shot of a man sitting on a rock. He is looking out at the ocean with a piece of paper on his lap. I later find out that this is the main protagonist of the documentary. His name is Modou. As he sits contemplatively on the rock, he receives an incoming WhatsApp message. He listens to the message while rubbing his head with one hand. A woman’s voice begins to speak impatiently in Wolof. It sounds like his mother. She says:

Modou, I’ve been calling you for days, you ignore my calls. You see my calls, but know that for days we have not cooked. I’m old and I’m tired, washed out.

I would like to know what the studies are for.

You are no better than your friends, do like them so we can get through this.

As Modou listens to his mother, the shots alternate between close-ups of the side of his face, where his chin is resting on his hands, and slightly wider shots of the other side of his body, where we see him sitting, listening intently to his mother’s message, still rubbing his head. Halfway through the mother’s message, the visuals switch to a shot of a street vendor selling fruit in the streets of Dakar, and then back to a close-up of Modou.



³² This introduction is accompanied by *Part III* of the multimedia production [04:42-08:40]



Still 4 (top) & Still 5 (bottom): Shot of the main protagonist (Modou) and a street vendor in the streets of Dakar, both stills from the documentary “Bataaxal”

The voice note comes to an end and the documentary moves on to the thoughts and reflections of the main character. After a moment of silence, Modou begins to reflect, while changing images accompany his thoughts:

All my friends are gone.

They raise the bar in their families.

(Modou starts folding a piece of A4 paper whilst he continues to reflect)

I'm my family's only hope.

I must join them at any cost.

(The visuals show shots from the Dakar streets, and then back to a shot of Modou sitting by the beach, and subsequently, changes to video footage of kids playing football on the streets.

Modou continuous)

My diplomas are of no use to me here.

(The images change to a close-up shot of the A4 paper in his hand. Now I see he has folded a paper aeroplane)

I am still unemployed.

(The footage switches back to the streets of Dakar. They then return to a close-up shot Modou's body, where you see him looking at the paper aeroplane in his hand)

Will I go the legal way?

No, they will refuse me the visa.

(I now see how Modou starts to unfold the paper aeroplane. As he continuous to narrate)

I don't have the right passport,

I have an African passport.

The free movement of people and goods is not for us.

(I observe how Modou starts folding the piece of paper into something else)

It is for them alone their law.

(I now see how Modou is refolding the paper: this time he is making a paper boat)

Why not the sea?

No visa fee or reason for travel

People die crossing.

(The paper boat is now finished. Modou looks at it in his hand)

No, it's risky.

But this adventure is uncertain.

(Modou now holds the paper boat in front of a wide-angled shot of the ocean)

Victims of poor governance and too many mandates.

I have to go. I have to go.

Leaving, not leaving that is the question?

Memo writing and transcription by Hannah Kay, May 2023, Amsterdam

Stories are embedded in different frames, which are a central organising mechanism of stories as they “present a certain view of a story in much the same way a picture frame or a window frame limits what a viewer sees” (Brown, 2019: 1). These frames help us to make sense of the stories being told, and to construct certain perspectives on different topics. As illustrated above, this middle section of the documentary holds two narratives: the first is uttered through the mother’s voice message, while the second is articulated through Modou’s train of thought.

The first story is led by the documentary maker who sketches the “migration” situation through the mother’s voice. He conceptualises the phenomenon of “migration” in a similar way to the New Economic Labour Migration (NELM) theory founded by Stark (1978, 1991). The functionalist paradigm of migration theories, to which NELM belongs, conceptualises the act of “migrating” as an individual rational choice (De Haas, 2021). Conversely, like the documentary, NELM’s theory presents it as a *collective* decision. This is illustrated by the scene where his mother sends a voice message urging Modou to follow in the footsteps of his friends: she instructs him to “do like them”. This message also makes it clear that the friends have gone abroad to help their families, while the mother in this case gives the impression that the main protagonist is being selfish: Modou is still studying in Dakar while his family is waiting for him to provide an income. Another similarity with the NELM theory is that “migration” is not shown as an act undertaken by those living in absolute poverty, but rather by those living in deprivation (De Haas, 2021).

Although his mother says that the family hasn't eaten properly for days, Modou himself has the means to study. The images that accompany the narration also show everyday life on the streets of Dakar, where street vendors walk around trying to make an income for the day. Again, these are not images of absolute poverty, but it should not be confused with a comfortable and easy life. A final feature of the NELM theory is that “migration” is a risk-sharing and risk-reducing strategy. The first point is unclear in the documentary: for example, whether family or friends would contribute financially to his journey abroad if he decided to emigrate. The latter, however, is quite clear, as the whole family would benefit from remittances. This is also something that Ndiaye (2021) discusses earlier, as 'migration' is a way of having financial resources for the families left behind.

The second storyline, conversely, overlaps with the criticisms of NELM theory and, more generally, of functionalist theories: namely, that they lack human agency, fail to include macro-structural factors that shape the migration process (such as the role of states, labour recruiters and other intermediaries, such as humanitarian organisations) and present the “migration” process as linear (De Haas, 2021). This second storyline overcomes these critiques and instead outlines the “migrant” reality as a puzzle that involves a complicated train of thought that takes place over an extended period of time. This period of reflection is metaphorically and aesthetically illustrated by the paper letter, which is folded from a paper plane into a boat:

Here, social pressure pushes him to stand in front of the sea and think. Yes. Do you see? He pulled himself up there, he tortured himself in front of the sea (...) It's not an impulsive decision, it is something to think about. And here it all comes down to this paper. Yes, all I have on this paper is to say should I go to sea?

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

As we follow the thoughts of the main protagonist, we see how he reacts to the societal and familial pressures he faces. Modou is the family's “only hope” and his diplomas are worthless in Dakar because he is “still unemployed”. It is clear to me that this is not the first time he has considered whether to go abroad. However, Modou is aware of the inequalities regarding his freedom of movement, as he explains: “I have an African passport. The free movement of people and goods is not for us”. The main protagonist talks about the macro-structural factors of “migration” policies and the neo-colonial “migration” industry. Modou argues that the law only works for those who designed it, illustrating its discriminatory nature: “it is their law for them alone”. The people who designed it are clearly from the “Global North” - in this case, more specifically, various European member states. This came up in my conversation with Baba Diedhiou, who asked why, for example, European students, including myself,

have the opportunity to study or work in Senegal without extensive administrative procedures, but vice versa is impossible:

Yes, and when I denounce the fact that we have African passports, it's just a way of saying that we are always asked to do a lot in order to be able to travel.

So we too must be free, like all the young people of the world, to travel like Europeans, to study, to do research, to go there to write your dissertation.

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

This section of the documentary also points to something that is often neglected in stories and their framing. People are often portrayed as naive and unaware of the dangers of irregular “migration”. In this example, however, it is clear that the protagonist is aware, and moreover, gives a legitimate justification for why people undertake dangerous journeys: “No visa fee or reason for travel”. In other words, in order to travel by sea, people do not have to go through an endless and costly administrative process, but simply pay for their ticket and set off. Of course, Modou explains the risks associated with irregular boat “migration”, but he also mentions that his current situation is “uncertain”. In both situations, young people are “victims” of “poor governance and mandates”. Here the documentary maker is referring to “migration” related governance, but also to non-“migration” related policies that create a lack of opportunities and financial insecurity in the country.

As mentioned earlier, frames play a role in the way one looks at a particular story and help to construct a particular social and political reality. The framing of “migration” and the reality of “migrants” through the illustrated perspectives of the mother and Modou construct “migration” as something inherently a multi-scalar, multi-layered and interconnected phenomenon. This is further demonstrated by the different thematic focuses that Baba Diedhiou’s documentary sheds light on as he tells the story of why people migrate and how this process is shaped. In the rest of this chapter, these themes, as well as other themes addressed by different artists and artworks, will be briefly explained in terms of “migration” and the “migrant” situation, and how this relates to existing scholarship.

The Family

In the work of Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak (2020: 303) kinship is described as “the family”, and they go on to show how the role of kinship is deployed in various works (*idem.*). For analytical purposes I refer to kinship as the social system of family ties that extend beyond blood relatives. The role of families and kin relationships play an important role in the social organisation of households and life trajectories of family members, including influencing decisions to move. During my fieldwork, the

theatre group I followed specifically re-enacted the role of kinship in the decision to “migrate”. This is illustrated in the following description of the performance:

The performance is an artistic interpretation of the pre-departure and departure of a journey to Europe. The script contains a lot of interpretation. As they explained that participation from the audience is key, I suggested that I participate, and they happily grabbed this opportunity to get me to join instead of just watching. The story goes like this: a father convinces his wife to send their son to Spain to earn money. As he explains, all these “big houses” in the neighbourhood and people with beautiful things, are the result of people emigrating abroad and earning lots of money. Pointing to different houses, he says: he went to Germany, this family went to the USA and that family went to Spain. After some discussion, the mother is persuaded to send her son abroad. They call him and tell him that he must go to Spain. They give him 400,000 CFA for the trip (the equivalent of about 600 euro). In the next scene, the son leaves for the beach and pirogues (boats) to go to Europe, but his best friends have to stop and convince him to stay and instead leave in a regular way (...).

Fieldwork Note by Hannah Kay, March 2023, Dakar

As this excerpt from the fieldwork illustrates, there are several ways in which kinship plays a role in the decision to “migrate”. First, the way in which they provide the financial means for the journey, covering the costs of travel. Second, the way in which family and kin are affected by the circulation of “migrants” “material and emotive resources across different localities” (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak, 2020: 304). Cole and Groes (2016) have coined the term “affective circuits” to describe this. The example above shows how friends and relatives back home are impressed by their neighbours’ goods and money, but also how these impressions are intertwined with emotions such as awe. Other artists also refer to these “affective circuits”, but more in relation to ideas and ways of life that are primarily transmitted through social media. This also demonstrates the transnational component of kinship, where “migrants” tell kin and friends about their new and improved lives in order to convince them to travel to Europe. As Fadaline explains in our interview, his friends and family call him to convince him how great life is in Europe. However, he explains that he knows that many of them do not have such a luxurious life. This example also illustrates that when looking at the role of kinship, secrets should also be part of the analysis: for example, analysing what family and friends reveal to each other and what they hide? Third, the role of kinship is illustrated in relation to family obligations and social pressures. This is something that BMD emphasises in his song “Pression Sociale” and in our conversation. He explained how men carry all of the financial responsibility for the family as within Senegalese society this is a man’s role: “*L’homme qui fait la maison, c’est l’homme qui construit la maison (...) c’est*

l'homme qui nourrit les femmes". Similarly in his song he addresses the social pressure faced by young men:

nioko diene bonn They accused him of being bad
diene ko niakk diom they accused him of being without courage
taxaw def ko noon they stood and made him their enemy
mu feppou dieul yoon that's when he left

Lyrics from *Pression Sociale* by BMD (2022), translation and interpretation by Khady Postma, June 2023

BMD's statement on the role of men furthermore illustrates how kinship, "migration" and gender are also intertwined, showing how the "migration" decision differs between men and women. This aspect of gender is discussed in a subsequent paragraph "The Role of Women". It is however striking that the showcased examples, regarding the role of kinship within the "migration" decision, primarily shed light on "the dark side of kinship" (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak, 2020; Geschiere, 2020). This is despite kinship often being brought into relation as an important mechanism of solidarity as it is a source of social capital for many "migrants" and their families (idem.).

The Role of Women

Gender is less of a thematic focus in the work of artists and in the interviews conducted. Most who refer to the "migrant" figure are implicitly referring to young men when they speak of the African youth. In our conversations, however, it becomes clear that the artists do recognise that women are affected by "migration": in many cases they are left behind with families. Women, therefore, according to these artists, should not be neglected from discourses on "migration". This is a similar discourse on the place of women within the "migration" process to that presented by economic models of "migration", such as NELM. These models have been criticised for ignoring unequal power relations within a family as they shifted the rational choice decision from the individual to the household level (Boyd & Grieco, 2014). In doing so, they failed to recognise that there are differences with how family decisions benefit different household members. Thus, although the artists recognise that women partake in the "migration" process, their works moreover don't correspond with the literature on the feminization of "migration". This literature notes a trend of an increase in the number of women participating in the "migration" journey, also coined as the "feminization of migration". Vouse & Toma (2015: 58) however argue that this pattern is not identifiable in Senegal and suggest this is linked to the "rigid patriarchal system prevailing in Senegal, which constrains women's autonomy". The artists and their artistic practices nevertheless fail to expand on gendered "migration" experiences, which the women's

movement and feminist theories began to address in the 1980s and 1990s. Their arguments included, among others, that women have different access to resources available in society, which affects how, when and where they can move (Boyd & Grieco, 2014). There are only two artists who bring this to light in their artistic practice, but with very subtle elements. For example, BMD refers to the sexual abuse of women in one verse of a song (namely, *Mon histoire*).³³ The other artist is Baba Diedhiou, who includes a female's voice ("Help!") in the documentary (see poem Part 2, p. 23). He furthermore explains:

(...) And in all my works, there is the presence of women in my work which means that it is also a way of showing that women do what men do. A way to devalue much more to the woman.

Immigration is not just men, it's women who are raped and all.

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

“Réussir au Sénégal”

In terms of the economic dimension of “migration”, the artists and artworks talk primarily about the role of work in relation to what drives people to move. They make the same point as Baba Diedhiou when he talks about labour: that people are looking for economic opportunities to boost their income portfolio of rural households. Similarly, some of the artists have moved within the country, from other rural areas to the capital, Dakar. The lack of job opportunities in their country is also mentioned, with artists explaining that it is not only the uneducated who are leaving, but also those with qualifications (Mya Sen, 18 February 2023). However, the artists claim that this lack of job opportunities exists elsewhere in the world. BMD, for example, sings about how these problems are found all over the world:

Rew yeupa meti all countries are hard
Fepp dafa meti everywhere is hard
Dara xeujoul soti not everything is sorted out
Ndox tourou ñu roti water has been spilled, we fill it up again

Lyrics from *DEM* by BMD, translation and interpretation by Khady Postma, June 2023

A number of artists reiterate this message, that emigration does not stand in any relation to economic success, such as Fadaline, who states the following: “One can emigrate and not succeed, one can stay and succeed. We can emigrate and succeed, we can stay and fail”.³⁴ Similar slogans repeat this message

³³ “*des filles violées*”, from the song *Mon histoire* by BMD (2022)

³⁴ Interview with Fadaline, 27 February 2023, Dakar

in various NGO campaigns, such as the mural outside of the office of the German Agency for International Cooperation's (GIZ) in Dakar (see *Figure 4*, p.20). The question on how to succeed in your own country remains nevertheless unexplored throughout the artistic practices. The only mention of this is in the the narrator's account that one has "to fight in life" and "work hard".³⁵ Zeinixx also explains how she explains to people that it is normal to fail once, or even twice, but you have to get up and try again:

Understand that we have the right to fall, but we have the duty to get up. So it's a bit, it's a question, a way of telling young people who read me or who listen to me that. Failure is not failing to do something. Failure is not succeeding the first time and not succeeding the second time. That's a failure.

Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar

However, there are two artists, Zeinixx and BMD, who go beyond addressing unemployment issues and instead set up more long-term projects to address labour issues. I have chosen to discuss one of these examples because I spent several days at BMD's youth centre during my fieldwork.

Earlier this year, BMD opened a youth centre (*Keur Ndaw Yi*) in his home town of Linguère in the Louga Region (see *Figure 5*). The youth centre is a continuation of his project on "irregular migration", which consists of an album (and documentary), the youth centre, national and international tours, and finally visit schools and universities to talk about the subject. BMD explains how the youth centre functions as a meeting space for children, teenagers, and young adults. It is also a space where they can follow training courses, including extra homework classes, and participate in various projects related to music, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and various skills training. Skills training depends on the organisations that are available and willing to provide volunteer training and the partnerships they are able to form.

³⁵ "on doit se battre dans la vie", from interview with Fadaline 27 February 2023, Dakar; "Fallou yen nga goor goorlu Fallou", from the song DEM by BMD (2022)



Figure 5. Keur Ndaw Yi, the youth centre set up by Big Makhou Djolof in Linguère, Senegal, photo by Hannah Kay (April, 2023)

On the other hand, the agricultural activities relate to how the youth should learn to use the land in a sustainable way. As BMD explained, they have bought a plot of land where they plan to run activities to learn how to use the fertile land they have, which he talks about in his songs. The youth centre itself also gives the young people the opportunity to set up their own (entrepreneurial) activities: for example, they wanted to set up a clothing line. The aim of the centre is therefore also to provide a learning space for the young people themselves.

During my fieldwork I saw how BMD is seen as a father figure to many young people in Linguère. He is highly respected, and you will find his name and album release date written on walls throughout the town (see *Figure 6*). I also noticed that the youth centre is indeed a space of dialogue, but above all a space of hope and opportunity created by his long-term commitment. To be precise, there are no specific workshops on “irregular migration”. This is something he talks about in his other projects, such as his album. Instead, the aim of the centre is to show that they can achieve something in their hometown, and that they can also ask him about his “migration” experiences and access information. In this way, BMD hopes to encourage people to stay or choose “regular” pathways.



Figure 6. Graffiti made by the “youth” in Linguère leading up to the release of this album, photo by Hannah Kay (April, 2023)

The other artist, Zeinixx, also accompanies her artistic activities with skill formations. She also explains that she is often invited to appear on television, radio or at other events. In addition to being a graffiti and slam artist, she mentions that this is an essential part of her artistic activities, because you have to talk to the youth. If an artist only informs or lectures the youth about dangers, then there is no conversation: “We have to feel the need to pass on this information first, because if we’re just waiting to be paid to raise awareness, we won’t be talking to young people”. Creating dialogue is hence recognised as an essential part of her work.

Sensibilisation through Art: A Form of Elitism?

During the ADF workshop I attended, the creation of dialogue was also a point of discussion between the various artists around the table. They pointed out that information and awareness-raising campaigns are losing their effectiveness, if they were effective in the first place, because young artists are tired of being told what to do and who knows best. Artists, and in some cases the organisations they work with, could therefore inadvertently fall into a form of “elitism” in their artistic practices.

For example, in Belgium. I go to apply for a visa and they refuse me. So I stay (...) it happens. Quite a few times, very often. And most people think that, for example, we travelling artists don't have this kind of problem. So that's why, most of the time, we can afford to say no, no, no, no. But these are our realities.

Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar

The ways in which the process of “migration” intersects with classism (i.e., discrimination on the basis of social class) is not addressed by any artworks nor in any conversations. For example, how the upper classes retain large amounts of “international capital” (i.e., economic, linguistic, and social capital) that allows them to move more freely and comfortably (Wagner, 2021). However, the way in which their artworks engage with certain issues also leads to reflections on this accusation of elitism. Zeinixx, for example, explained in our conversation how people around her often assume that because she is a well-known artist, she does not have problems with visa refusals (see quote above). They imply that she does not have the right to raise the issue and tell people that if they are rejected, they should get up, move on and try again. However, she makes it clear in our conversation that she regularly has problems with visas. Baba Diedhiou, on the other hand, does not talk about receiving accusations about his privileges, but he is well aware of them. Having travelled in “excellent conditions” as an international footballer and now as an artist, he channels these privileged experiences into something that everyone with an African passport deserves.

Discriminatory “Migration” Policies/Practices and Borders

Apart from Baba Diedhiou, who explicitly addresses the discriminatory nature of borders and 'migration' policies in his documentary and interview, other artworks do not address how the opportunity to move is unequally distributed. Scholarly work from critical border studies explains how borders are implicated in the subjugation of people, as they mobilise some while immobilising others (Anderson, 2019; De Genova, 2020; Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). They further note how those who are able to move are subject to different conditions according to social lines of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, etc. In Eva Diallo’s work, however, these workings of the border and its dividing line can be seen. Her documentary photo series illustrates this through its temporality: in other words, the time she spends in a country depends on the time it took her cousins to travel across the country, which was linked to visa issues and their financial means. She explains, for example, that it is relatively easy for people on the move to travel through ECOWAS countries. This is because Senegalese people do not find themselves travelling illegally. Whereas countries such as Libya can take up to weeks, months or years to cross.

And so, for me it’s more a case of trying to transcribe it in terms of time, let’s say, and each time I try to go to the country for about the same length of time as my cousins did, so that I can reproduce a bit, understand life in the same way. Then there’s the fact that Mali and Burkina Faso are very small countries, and in fact they’re part of ECOWAS, so in any case it’s not illegal to go from Senegal to Burkina Faso. So, things are moving very quickly. It used to take 24 hours or two days maximum in some countries. And then we see that in countries that are starting to become a little more complicated

in terms of migration policy, it can take a lot longer in Niger all at once. Several months in Libya, almost a year in the country (...).³⁶

Interview with Eva Diallo, 14 February 2023, Dakar

The challenges people face in Libya are similarly, if more explicitly, illustrated in Senny Camara's song *Dialé*, where she sings: "they are being killed in Libya, turning them into slaves in Libya". These artists refer to, among others, the previously discussed violence that people encounter in countries and at their borders.³⁷ Senny Camara in particular acknowledges the racial dimension of this border policing and the "re-drawing of the global colour line" (De Genova, 2018). It should be noted, however, that other artists do recognise that Black and Brown people are violently targeted by bordering practices and the link with (post)coloniality, but do not necessarily address this in their artistic practices. They are also more concerned with the current misdeeds of their own government. Throughout the years, they have always withheld information about the reality of "migration" in relation to irregular routes and have never come up with solutions.³⁸ Of course, the artists were frustrated with the actors of the international or European community, but this is not the focus of their artworks: instead, they chose to focus more directly on their country and its people.

The Marabout

Fadaline is the only artist who brings the role of the Marabout (*serigne* in Wolof) into our conversation. A Marabout is an Islamic spiritual leader who provides spiritual and esoteric services, including blessings, prayers, and advice on life decisions. In Senegal these spiritual guides are highly revered and symbolic. According to Gueye & Deshingkar (2020: 6), they play an important role in the "migration" process: "Marabouts are extremely important in shaping the migration decision and mediating between God and migrants to help them cope with the risks and uncertainties that they encounter along the way". In this way, these spiritual guides stand between a person and God and thus influence people's interpretation of risk and their fate. They also provide emotional support and protection for the journey ahead. This is expressed, among other things, in the giving of spiritual symbols such as amulets or charms:

³⁶ Original quote: "*Et donc moi c'est plutôt en fait, j'essaie de le transcrire sous forme de temporalité, disons, et à chaque fois j'essaie de me rendre dans le pays à peu près la même durée que ce que mes cousins sont restés pour pouvoir reproduire un peu, comprendre la vie sous la même forme. Après, le fait que au Mali, au Burkina, c'est des tout petits pays et en fait ça fait partie de la CEDEAO, donc de toute façon il n'y a pas, ce n'est pas clandestin de passer du Sénégal au Burkina Faso. Donc là ça va très vite un peu. Ça faisait tellement 24 h ou deux jours maximum dans les pays. Et après on voit que dans les pays qui commencent à être un peu plus compliqués en termes de politique migratoire, justement, il peut se passer beaucoup plus de temps au Niger d'un coup. Plusieurs mois en Libye, presque un an sur le sur le pays, sur le territoire (...)*"

³⁷ See *The "Regular Migrant"* (p.29)

³⁸ Interview with Mya Sen: "*But most of our government also contributes to this uh I'd say (...) They don't really tell us things. (...) Yes, you hear about it everywhere, so it's, it's something that we live with, that we wait for every day, yes, but we've never had a solution.*"

You know, the marabout is there to protect you. To see your future. He says he's going to protect you for the journey. That's it. You give him 100,000 francs, for example. Er yes, he'll give you things, gris-gris and so on. Even if this marabout is telling the truth. Did you have to die?

Interview with Fadaline, 27 February 2023, Dakar

Despite the influential role of the Marabouts within the “migration” process (Gemmeke, 2013; Gueye & Deshingkar, 2020; Nyamnjoh 2016), I found it was remarkable that not a single artistic practice addressed this topic, and only one artist mentioned it in our conversation. This is particularly the case for those artists and artistic practices who want to tackle misinformation and raise awareness among young people. It is important to note, however, that this may not be a coincidence. The Marabout networks have, among other things, come to occupy critical positions in Senegalese society, including illegal businesses (Nyamnjoh, 2016). As a result, they not only command a great deal of respect, but also considerable power. Therefore, people may choose not to speak incorrectly about Marabouts, firstly because they are very respected and this is “not done”, and secondly because of their involvement in illegal migration businesses.

[Part IV] How “Migration”-Related Art is Entangled with Place and Time
[08:41-09:31]³⁹



Still 6: Shot of Modou ready to place the paper boat in the sea, still from the documentary film “Bataaxal”

In the final scene of the documentary, Modou gets up, walks to the ocean, bends down, and places the paper boat on the water. The boat floats away and follows the flow of the Atlantic. The soundtrack of the documentary starts again, and eventually the paper boat disappears off into the ocean. The documentary ends with a similar shot to the opening of the film: a close-up shot of the water, where you follow the movement of the water.

Memo writing by Hannah Kay, May 2023, Amsterdam



Still 7: Shot of paper boat in the ocean, from the final scenes of the documentary film “Bataaxal”

³⁹ This introduction is accompanied by *Part IV* of the multimedia production [08:41-09:41]

The final scene of the film is marked by an uncertainty that is made possible by the aesthetic elements and the dramaturgy of the film. On the one hand, the paper boat launched by the main protagonist leaves the viewer wondering what the future holds for Modou: will he stay in Senegal, continue his studies and find a job in the country? Will he attempt the boat trip? Or will he find a way to travel by plane? This uncertainty is also illustrated by the paper boat, which slowly moves and disappears with the movement of the waves. The documentary maker explains that the element of water, which is present from the beginning to the end of the film, is a sign of “instability”.⁴⁰ The use of water is therefore a metaphor to show the uncertainty and unpredictability of the situation and journey of people on the move: like water, “migration” is in constant flux and the paths of mobility are constantly being shaped and reshaped.

The filmmaker goes on to explain that this uncertainty is a reflection of society and what the young people experience in their everyday lives. As a result, he felt the need to make a film about the “failures” within society that put young people in this unpredictable “migration” situation. He therefore both shows what pushes them from within society to make this uncertain journey, and also warns them of the perilous journey faced by people who undertake boat “migration”. As he explains, he was “fed up” with Senegal’s constant state of mourning resulting from the loss of young lives in boat tragedies over the years. Senegalese youth are also citizens of the world, and people are tired of seeing their brothers die at sea”:

Young people, young people, young people who die all the time, all the time... Because the noise, the shit, yes, there were a lot of young people we met who every time put Senegal in mourning, young people who died and as a young person, it affected me a lot. Yes, it affected me a lot and I said to myself, why not? I want to make the film and publish it, or even enter it in competitions to speak in the place of young Africans, in the place of every young person in the world. I want to be a citizen of the world and say that we’re fed up with our brothers dying in the sea.

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

Baba Diedhiou explains how the insecurity he projects in the film about the situation of “migrants” stems from the social, economic, and political situation of young people in Senegal. He talks about the social pressures that people face, unemployment and underemployment issues, and the fact that young people are not listened to by their government and the world. These are also reasons highlighted in the recent publication by Zingari et al. (2023: 30), who argue that insecurity results from the intertwinement of “phenomena such as mass unemployment and underemployment, deagrarianization, and

⁴⁰ Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar: “Yes, as far as I’m concerned, there’s no stability in water.”

environmental changes (...) with a growing criminalization of displacement and an irregularization of trans-Saharan and intercontinental migration”. In addition to the socio-political context of youth that has influenced the documentary maker, he also touches on the role of history: the recurring tragedies. In addition to these more general developments in society, there are also more individual and personal stories that have influenced his work.

The first series is his career as a footballer in Italy and his career as a photographer with exhibitions in various European countries. Here he observed with his own eyes the precarious situations in which illegalised “migrants” lived,⁴¹ and also listened to their stories of the treacherous journeys they had undertaken. This, of course, can also be linked to the socio-political environment in which he lived, where illegalised “migrants” were discriminated against in “host societies” such as Italy and France. The second personal event is the loss of close family and friends. He tells a particular story of a dear friend of his who was involved in commerce and ran a successful and growing business. This person had a friend who had left Senegal for Europe and arrived safely. Before he left, this friend suffered from asthma, but when he arrived in Europe, he had no symptoms. He persuaded his friend, the businessman, to make the same journey for his own health, assuring him that the sea was “no problem”. Baba tells how his business friend dropped everything and decided to make the journey, but unfortunately never really left Senegalese waters, as the boat caught fire and he died instantly:

We had a friend who was trading here, everything was going very well, and he had 3 million (CFA) in his account and millions in cash, and he was gradually making progress in his business. But one of his best friends left by sea and he was asthmatic every time. The guy was ill here, but he called to tell him that since I’ve been here, I’ve been feeling very well. There’s nothing at sea and he left everything behind and took to the sea. He hasn’t even started. It’s a story here at... It’s their boat that caught fire... Yes, he died instantly. Yes, no... It affected me a lot because it’s something that really touched me.

Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar

A third personal story is also linked to his own economic situation. His art is autonomous, in other words he works independently on his artistic projects. For this particular documentary, however, Baba Diedhiou received help from professional filmmakers for the final editing. Although he works independently, he may also draw inspiration for his projects from his other jobs at the Blaise Senghor

⁴¹ Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar: “That’s why I said to myself as an artist, I have to try and express myself visually with photos and also stories of people I’ve seen in Europe, who aren’t in very good conditions, who were asking, asking for money. It affected me (...)”

Cultural Centre and as a professor of advertising and graphic design at the National School of Fine Arts in Dakar.

Thus, the above examples demonstrate that there are multiple ways in which art is shaped by “place”. In other words, meaning is constructed through the artist’s interaction their milieu (for instance, social, cultural, and historical) (Rancière, 2015; Tuan, 1979). This interaction with the environment is additionally related to “time” in different ways. This documentary can be related to the work of Grabska & Horst (2022), who relate the role of “time” to art through the inspiration drawn from experiences and memories, and furthermore how this is used to reshape the future. This is similar to what Baba Diedhiou does: he uses memories and experiences to make a statement about the struggles for people's freedom of movement, and he hopes that in the future every citizen of the world will have the same right to movement. The artist’s interaction with different “places” has also shaped his ambitions and role as an artist. He states that artists “live with the problems of society” and “are alive because of these problems”.⁴² More importantly, artists “walk with a mirror of society”⁴³ and therefore have an obligation to address issues that are at play in society. As a consequence, he suggests that an artist has a responsibility to make these issues *visible*.

Like Baba Diedhiou, other artists share these assumptions about the role of the artist. I will discuss these further in the next section of this chapter, as well as the role of place. For analytical purposes, I have chosen to focus on three aspects of place, rather than discussing all the ways in which artists' environments have shaped their artistic practices. First, I look at how personal tragedies and the repetition of these accidents led them to address this issue. This is something that is mentioned by all the artists. Second, there are significant differences between the artists’ economic situations and their connections to different organisations. Third, I will briefly touch on a more personal observation of artists who are, or have been part of the diaspora and how this has shaped their work.

Artists: the Conveyers of Messages

(..) Listening to them, but as an artist too, you can have the opportunity to create something very high up so that everyone can...there you go, hear, and try to say that there you go, it’s something we need to think about and speak about in different ways yes that’s it. (...) being an artist but more, that is to say having a contribution to society, that’s very important. So as an artist, for me, each of us has to have something that’s not just music to make people dance.

⁴² Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar: “*Oui, en tant qu’artiste. Parce qu’en fait, nous les artistes, on vit avec les problèmes de la société. Et c’est à partir des problèmes de la société qui nous fait vivre.*”

⁴³ Interview with Baba Diedhiou, 31 March 2023, Dakar: “*Et quand il marche avec le miroir de la société, il faut montrer les failles de la société.*”

As Mya Sen explains, artists have a role that goes beyond, for example, creating music for leisure. Conversely, they are empowered to convey messages that are going on in society that may be causing distress. Through their artistic practice, they can raise awareness of these issues by making reality more tangible, understandable, and visible. Finally, artists can use their voice and have a platform to express their opinions. They also have the opportunity to propose alternative and different discourses to the existing ones and can try to improve society. Being an artist therefore comes with a certain responsibility. This view is shared by all the artists I interviewed. The messages they convey are aimed at different audiences: at “the youth”, but also at their governments and, finally, transnationally at all citizens of the world. This shows how they convey messages aimed at different segments of society. In other words, they don’t only target the government, but can also stand behind government statements directed at the youth, i.e., not to engage in “irregular” boat “migration”. I elaborate on this point in the section “Autonomy or Heteronomy?”.

“It’s something *we live*”⁴⁴

More specifically, “irregular migration” is something that is present in the lives of all artists. Statistics on “irregular” boat “migration” from Senegal to Europe are something that is documented, but the numbers fluctuate greatly. IOM is one of the organisations that monitors these transnational movements along the West African Maritime Route (WAMR). It is estimated that between January and February this year, 1865 “migrants” arrived in the Canary Islands (IOM, 2023b). When this route was at its peak in 2006, they estimate more than 30 000 “migrants” undertook this journey (IOM, 2020). Numbers have however fluctuated enormously over the years as large numbers remain invisible and because of the increasing number of interventions (Beauchemin et al., 2014: 24). These fluctuations are moreover linked to how many statistics only note the *arrivals*. Thus, although the WAMR being a minority of mobility patterns, since most “migrations” occur by plane or other routes (see Beauchemin et al., 2014: 24), they nevertheless have a far-reaching impact on Senegalese society. This is linked to the tragedies associated with the loss of young lives. As several interviewees explained, everyone has a family member, neighbour or friend they have lost. Multiple interviewees referred to the Mbour boat tragedy in 2020, where a boat caught fire and dozens of people passed away not far from the Senegalese shoreline (France24, 2020).⁴⁵ As I am writing this part of my empirical findings, news has moreover been published on how a fishing vessel and two *pirogues* (boats), holding about 300 “migrants”, have

⁴⁴ Interview with Mya Sen, 18 February 2023, Dakar: “(...) *I don't know how to explain it, but everyone knows, because if you go into another house, you'll find a family that's lost maybe a nephew or a son or something like that. Yes, it happens all the time (...) Yes, you hear about it everywhere, so it's, it's something we go through, something we wait for every day.*”

⁴⁵ See for whole article, last accessed 15 July 2023 at: <https://observers.france24.com/fr/20201028-large-senegal-pirogue-canaries-feu-nauffrage-route-dangers-migrants>.

gone missing (NRC, 2023).⁴⁶ These boat disappearances, and in some cases tragedies, are not exceptional and have been a recurring phenomenon on the doorsteps of Senegalese people for almost two decades. As a result, they create wounds that people, including these artists, have to live with on a daily basis. The following excerpt from an interview illustrates the hardship caused by these man-made disasters and the grief they leave behind:

OK, that's a really moving theme. I can say sadly, because what pushed me to sing this song, I've had many brothers, many friends and many people I know, who have died, who have stayed in the Mediterranean (...) Well, one day, when someone calls you, they tell you that such and such a person has drowned in the water. You see, it's so sad. And then there are the people whose bed I shared, we played together, we grew up together. Then one day they call you and say they've died, you know. It's so sad. Now, to pay tribute to them (...) There are people who have left their beautiful families behind. Some people even left their wife three months pregnant when they left. I know a friend of mine who left his wife three months pregnant.

Interview with Fadaline, 27 February 2023, Dakar

Autonomy vs. Heteronomy?

Artists need to make a living, and therefore, in some situations, may adapt their art to what the client, audience, or global art markets desire (Ruiz & Miyamoto, 2021: 16). The artists who I met can be divided into three categories, according to their connections with external organisations and funding: “autonomous”,⁴⁷ “collaboration/partnership”,⁴⁸ “commissioned”⁴⁹. The first group includes those artists who work independently on their artistic projects. This also means that they work without funding, or occasionally receive a grant for their project, and often have other jobs to earn a living. The second group, on the other hand, relates to those artists who are approached by organisations to create a partnership. In these situations, the artists have either already started their own projects or have been approached with a general theme to collaborate on together. For example, BMD had written his album and was later approached by IOM and other national and international organisations, who helped with the release of his album.⁵⁰ Artists in these cases are thus partially funded by an external organisation. The third group, by contrast, refers to those artists or groups of artists who are commissioned for a

⁴⁶ See for whole article, last accessed 15 July 2023, at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2023/07/09/zeker-300-migranten-vanuit-senegal-onderweg-naar-canarische-eilanden-al-dagen-vermist-a4169352>

⁴⁷ Includes the following artists: Fadaline, Eva Diallo, Mya Sen, Baba Diedhiou

⁴⁸ Includes the following artists: Zeinixx, BMD

⁴⁹ Includes the following artists: Bêt

⁵⁰ Among others, the European Union, DGASE (*Direction générale d'Appui aux Sénégalais de "Extérieur"*), GMD (Governance Migration and Development), the Spanish Embassy etc.

specific activity: in other words, they are given a brief and a theme to work on. This also means that they are at least partially dependent on external funding.

What is noticeable is that all three categories are part of the “complicated expansion of borderwork” (Watkins, 2017), as there is a multiplication of actors involved in the activities related to the making and unmaking of borders. There are also signs of an increase in “developmental borderwork” through awareness campaigns (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021). Through the fieldwork of this study, I am not sufficiently informed to assess the impacts or dynamics of these artistic practices in relation to their financing. However, questions can be raised about the commercialisation of the cultural and art scene, as this would hinder the creative freedom of artists, and therefore their autonomy. This tension between the *autonomy* and *heteronomy* of art can therefore be commented upon. Most importantly, when artists collaborate with someone or work on a commission, it does not mean that they lose all their autonomy (see quote below). In fact, as illustrated in the first part of this analysis, artists can channel and portray stories through their aesthetic elements. In these cases, artists still have *aesthetic autonomy* as they can guide how the audience experiences the subject. Zelizer (2010) similarly argues that not only is art influenced by the market, but the market can be influenced by culture. It is also possible to consider the degree of autonomy of artists who work independently: for example, artists who take on other side jobs that might feed into their knowledge of a subject. In this sense, it is questionable whether art can ever be separated from its environment, or from life? According to Rancière (2017: 137) this is not the case. He states that “art is an autonomous form of life”, and consequently, argues how art, life and autonomy intersect and oppose each other in three ways: “Art can become life. Life can become art. Art and life can exchange their properties”. In either way, artists and their artistic practices are therefore entangled with life, and consequently, politics and place in their own ways.

I like to have my freedom of thought, my freedom of creation and my freedom of expression when it comes to certain things. That's why I only do things that make sense to me. I don't do things for the money (...) They could pay me millions for something that doesn't interest me, I won't do it because, for me, it's important to feel what you're doing, to believe in it, for it to be true, otherwise it's hypocritical. I'm not like that. (...) Yes, there have been times when I've touched or not touched money after a job, when I've left it and given it away because it was something that was done under pressure. So that's why now, what I decide is that when I decide to say yes to something, it has to be something that interests me. Secondly, that I have total freedom to think, create, illustrate and express myself about the thing as I see fit. After that, I'm also open to discussion. I'm open to any consensus on corrections, or on avoiding offending anyone's sensibilities. I can, yes, but I'm not being conditioned.

Interview with Zeinixx, 20 April 2023, Dakar

Diasporic Art: an Opportunity for Resistance?

Although I have discussed art through a reflective approach, instead of analysing their transformative potential, there is one insight concerning those artists who belong to diaspora communities, or who have similarly inhabited this grey space in-between two countries. I observed how the way these artists engage with the topic is somewhat different. Importantly, I am not implying this is necessarily a better approach to art on “migration”, yet there is an ongoing debate by civil society organisations, such as DIADEM, who have been demanding a greater inclusion of diaspora communities in “migration” discourses. This is because they are often included regarding their economic contribution; however, they also have different knowledge, expertise, and experiences that inform possible alternative ways of engaging with the phenomenon of “migration” (Nsoudou, 2022: 11). The Senegalese-Swiss artist Eva Diallo, for example, offers a neutral understanding of “migration”, or in the words of Ash Amin (2022), as something “not wholly good, not wholly bad”. Consequently, offering a way forward from past framings in hyperboles. Another alternative way is moreover presented by Senny Camara and Baba Diedhiou: namely, they conversely engage with more “critical” art (Mouffe, 2013).⁵¹ These two artists namely dare to point out the root cause of the problems more explicitly. Whether this has more to do with their different experiences and sources of knowledge, or with the way they may feel more “protected” because they have the ability to move from one country to another and enjoy more democratic and social protection, is a question which I cannot answer. However, this could potentially be explored in future research, along with the ways in which diasporic arts can provide opportunities to transform discourses of “migration”, as they have been identified as a potential actor capable of conveying a unified and Afro-centric narrative of “migration” (Nsoudou, 2022).

⁵¹ See *Approach* (p.9)

Discussion and Conclusion

The empirical findings of the previous chapters have provided various insights through the uncovered stories. The first part illustrated how the aesthetic strategies of artists are closely linked to the aims of the artists and their artistic practices, through the developed labels of “steering courses of action”, “reinventing imaginaries” and “stopping and thinking”, thereby, demonstrating how aesthetics and politics are intertwined (Rancière, 2003: 203). In contrast, the second section stayed closer to the words and phrases of the artists to analyse how meaning is constructed through the narrator. Two emotions and feelings were identified as prevalent in all the works and conversations: the mourning of the “warriors” and the establishment and construction of national and pan-African pride. The third section, on the other hand, analysed the broader thematic focuses that are addressed in the construction of the “migration” situation: namely, the central role of kin in the decision and process of “migration”, the absence of art dealing with gendered “migration” stories, the artists’ recognition of the lack of labour market opportunities and statements on how emigration does not coincide with economic success, how art on “migration” can fall into a critique of elitism, the artists’ recognition of the discriminatory logic of borders based on race, and finally, it briefly unfolded the role of the Marabout in the “migration” process. The fourth section conversely demonstrated how artists do not live in a vacuum, but are situated within a milieu that influences their artistic practices. As a result, this final chapter interweaves these empirical findings with existing academic work, while pointing out the limitations of this study. It then turns towards the conclusion where I answer the research question and make a final statement.

The Role of Art

The studies of humanities depart from the idea that “arts reflect and operate within boundaries of social practice, norms and values” (Hintjes and Ubaldo, 2019: 279). In other words, the arts are seen as a mirror of the social and political reality of life. Conversely, the field of social science, such as critical geography, has studied art as a medium of intervention. For example, critical geographers have questioned how artistic practices can be seen as drivers of urban development (Zebracki, 2013). They have looked into the impact of art and art-based interventions and how this meets its predefined objectives (Huijsmans & Grabska, 2022). This study, although more in line with the humanities perspective, can support both of these views on the role of art.

M. Ndiaye states that artists are important actors within society as they can advance ideas, mobilise, and bring about change. Particularly within the Senegalese context, the transformative power of art (and citizens) is something that has been illustrated by several studies in relation to the Y’en a Marre (we’re fed up) movement (Dimé, 2022; Gueye, 2013). However, as previously mentioned, this study falls more in line with the perspective of humanities on the role of art, since it has showcased that the transformative power of “migration”-related art is *disputable*. As M Ndiaye also said during our

conversation: “artists are incredibly important people”, but “at the same time, they need to be educated”. What he is implying is that artists have the power to change the discourse. They are however not always fully informed about the intricacies of the phenomenon and therefore run the risk of proposing a narrative that might hinder an alternative and transformative discourse. This is precisely what this thesis showcased: namely, there is a large diversity in topics that are addressed, each telling a story of their own.

This study can therefore provide further insights into the distinction between art as being “political” and “critical-political” art. The interventionist strand of literature, views artistic practices as withholding “alternative forms of knowing”, which has previously been defined as “critical-art” (Mouffe, 2013).⁵² For example, Grabska & Horst (2022) examined “critical-art” in the context of violence, war, and displacement in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Syria, among others. Their descriptions of “critical-art” include vocabulary such as “rupture”, “resistance”, and “transformation”. In the context of this study, however, these characteristics of art prove to be too provocative and revolutionary. This is related to the fact that the studied artistic practices are not always in opposition with the dominant social and political order: in fact, as illustrated in the empirical findings, they often touch on the same thematic foci as the grand narratives in public and political discourse. For example, the way in which artists highlight the dangers associated with boat “migration” is linked to the fight against “irregular migration” developed by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements. Similarly, the way in which the artists construct a narrative in which success in terms of labour is achievable in Senegal coincides with the focus of the international community on the social and economic “development” of the country to prevent “migration”. While this study cannot clarify why and how these discourses have converged, it can affirm that there is an *overlap*. It consequently demonstrates how art on “migration” cannot be categorized into “critical-art” because of this partial fusion of discourses.

There is art that has nevertheless been identified in this study as being more “critical” as it is inclined towards structural change in relation to the discriminatory and violent nature of “migration” policies and practices, such as the artistic practices categorised under the labels of “stop and think”, and diasporic art. This however is in a subtle manner: that is, one that pushes towards reflection. This is in line with Rancière’s (2015) description of how art can stimulate change without being too radically provocative, but rather by allowing us to be “absorbed in our thoughts, to distance ourselves, to have a moment of rest”. As the aesthetics of art illustrates, the same applies for how art can affect the senses in multiple ways and thus creating different stories and meanings: that is, addressing both “critical” and “political” elements at the same time, and of course targeting different audiences. As a result, in the case of the examined “migration”-related art, it is necessary to neglect this binary distinction between

⁵² See *Approach* (p.9)

“critical-political” art versus “political” art. Instead, it can be argued that all art is *political* as it constructs the phenomenon of “migration” and establishes the power relations and hierarchies at play.

Art, Place (and Time)

The field of human geography, anthropology and cultural studies have addressed the importance of spatial and temporal contexts in which artistic practices created. Despite this study having neglected the role of space, for example the importance of the urban spatial area in which most artists live, it contributes to existing academic work on the relevance of taking place and time into account.

The way in which art constructs place was demonstrated in the issues by Grabska & Horst (2022: 182). An example from the issue, is the work of the geographer and choreographer Christopherson (2022). Her work showcases how dance gives a Palestinian dancer the ability to transcend into an alternative place that enables the dancer and audience to escape from a politically and socially confined space. This example therefore demonstrates how art contributes to the process of place-making. Although the studied art does not give the artist the ability to transcend into another social and political reality, they similarly involved in the making of a new place: that is, in the creation of a new future “migration” reality. The other way in which art constructs place is conversely illustrated by Ruiz & Miyamoto’s (2021: 16), through the role of transnational and global connections. They note the impact of global art markets on artists and their art practices: in other words, artists must make a living, and therefore, they might shape their artistic practices according to the wishes of their audience. In contrast to the impact of the art market, this study has shown how art on “migration” is influenced by the commodification of art for development intervention purposes. As a result, illustrating how art is therefore inevitably involved in the construction of place and does not draw only from its milieu. Art and place are thus related in two ways: on the one hand, art can contribute to the making of “place”; on the other hand, art can be shaped by place. Both relationships are evident in this study, as artists and artistic practices are interwoven within a milieu, as their stories are constructed from their individual lived experiences, but also their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Grabska & Horst (2022: 182) additionally noted how time influences artists and their artworks, and how time is also entangled with place. As previously noted, they argue that artists frequently use memories and provide testimonies from their lived experiences. This can be supported by the findings of this study as meaning is shown to, among other things, be constructed through lived experiences. For instance, BMD’s album has resulted from his own testimonies as an “irregular” and “return migrant”. Another possibility in which “time” plays a role is the way in which artists envision and imagine alternative worlds in the future (Grabska & Horst, 2022). In other words, they project future alternative ways of life. This has also been noted in the art that has been studied: for example, the way in which Eva Diallo

speaks of “the journey” instead of “migration” in an attempt to change the way we think and imagine the phenomenon of “migration”. However, this idea of hers also relates back to place, as this meaning that she constructs is related to her own family history and upbringing in between Switzerland and Senegal. The empirical findings of this research thus confirm that artistic practices reflect the dynamics at work within a particular context or community at a certain moment in time, and vice versa contribute to its construction. This is in line with existing work in anthropology, cultural studies, and human geography.

The Construction of Theories on “Migration”

The deployed of an artistic lens in the study of “migration” has resulted in a somewhat eclectic approach in comparison to other theories on “migration” and the knowledge that they have produced. The field of migration studies is an interdisciplinary field containing not one general “migration” theory, but a multitude of approaches resulting in various ways of theory-building (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022). The field of migration studies nevertheless stems from the need of nation-states to govern mobility and therefore has been heavily critiqued for its *sedentary bias* (Bakewell, 2013): in other words, how the poor are constituted as a security issue. This view of seeing “migration” as a problem, originates from the epoch of European colonisation in which the legal and political system of “citizenship” was established, and as a result, certain forms of mobility became “illegal” (Mbembe, 2018; Mouthaan, 2022; Samaddar, 2020, 8). The governance of human mobility therefore originates from colonialism (and colonial-imperial slave trade), but many African states after independence continued to *shape* and *control* mobility. As a result, this study suggests that an artistic lens provides the opportunity to move beyond the viewing of mobility as an issue to be controlled, but rather, as simply an aspect of human life.

Even though this study may be critiqued by “migration” scholars for attempting to develop a grand theory on “migration”, as the deployed artistic lens gives insights into various units of analysis, I nevertheless suggest it provides the opportunity to move beyond the aforementioned sedentary bias in two ways. First, it can move beyond the pitfalls of “methodological nationalism”, which relates to how the nation-state is regarded as a natural societal boundary and central unit of analysis (Anderson, 2019; Brettell & Hollifield, 2022). As a result, the nation-state conceptualizes people on the move as a “problem” as they cross borders which are bound up with markers of identify tied to nationhood, and furthermore, downplays the role of the nation-state and its exclusionary nature. Second, in contrast, “methodological individualism” reduces “migration” to the individual, ignoring the potential influence of kin, households, and communities (Brettell & Hollifield, 2022). This study therefore contributes to “migration” theories as an approach that moves beyond the nation-state and the individual at the centre of analysis. It has namely managed to elucidate the multi-faceted nature of “migration” by delving into

local, national, and global dynamics at play, including how the nation-state is entangled in the “migration” process as well as kin and individuals. The artistic lens therefore helps to embed “migration” as part of social life. This is further supported by how the study has moved beyond the studying of the “migrant” situation as solely something that involves those people who are labelled as “migrants”. Rather, the artistic lens has given an approach to the “migration” story that showcases it as being a human story that is a part of everyone’s story. Although many artists that were finally included in this study have experienced the “migration” reality, it was useful to avoid the categorization of art according to the artists’ role as a being a “migrant” prior to the fieldwork; this would have undoubtedly led to the neglect of some of the studied works of art and hence created a more one-dimensional view on the phenomenon.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after expanding on the approach, empirical findings, and existing academic work, this thesis returns to the question that was posed in the introduction of this thesis: *What knowledge do Senegalese artists and their artistic practices produce about the contemporary “migration” situation?* It can be argued that the artists and their artistic practices first of all show that the “migration” situation is one that is deeply rooted in the daily lives of *all* Senegalese people and, more broadly, the whole African continent. These lived experiences are accompanied by many emotions: on the one hand, with deep sorrow, but also with dignity, national and Pan-African pride. The field of “migration” studies should therefore go beyond the analysis of “migrants”, or those actors who constitute them as a problem, as this phenomenon permeates every part of the social fabric. Second, the artists’ stories reflect an awareness of the themes that run through the phenomenon of “migration”. Their works are spread across several thematic axes, such as the discriminatory nature of “migration” policies, as well as the societal pressure faced by the youth and the persistent lack of opportunities. Although their knowledge is scattered, they demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Third, the stories told by artists seek to bring about transformations. Some stories overlap with those of government policies and international partnerships: namely, reducing “irregular migration” to reduce the loss of life at sea, and focusing on the “development” of opportunities and a better life at home (Zingari et al., 2023). This overlap exists where artists are involved in partnerships or new forms of “development” interventions. Important to note is that artists indicate that this does not mean that they are neglecting their aesthetic freedom; on the contrary, this remains a priority and it shows how creativity does not necessarily fall victim to the commodification of art (Zelizer, 2010). This can also be demonstrated as there are artists who manage to propose alternative ways of conceptualising people on the move, reflected in, among other things, their aesthetic strategies. Fourth, this research has also identified how diasporic art could be addressed in future research; the diaspora is seen as an important foundation to create a unified and Afro-centric narrative of “migration” (Nsoudou, 2022). They are

considered a community that has the ability to unify the currently scattered knowledges and discourses on “migration” within public and political discourses.

What this thesis can ultimately claim is that Senegalese artists are shown to be important actors in the construction of the contemporary “migration” situation, as well as actors who reflect the stories about “migration” that are at play in their milieu. As a result, they produce fragmented knowledge on the subject; some reproduce dominant discourses and thus fail to address certain issues, such as the gendered dimensions of “migration” and the role of the Marabout, while others manage to propose counter-hegemonic discourses that transform problematic notions of people on the move. Both, however, hope for a better future in which the right to move freely is lived up to. This raises the question of how artists’ engagement will continue to evolve.

I conclude this thesis with Baba Diedhiou’s metaphor of ocean water, in which he draws a parallel between the movement of waves and that of “migration”. According to the filmmaker, this marks the fluidity and uncertainty of one’s journey. In my view, this can be extended to the current role of art on “migration”, as it is constantly moving, shifting and open to being potentially reshaped into a new discourse.

Supplementary Material

1. Link to the documentary Bataaxal by Baba Diedhiou: <https://vimeo.com/667012560>.
2. Link to multimedia production: <https://we.tl/t-d97Q0ULQ2e>.

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Annex 1

Transcription of song from the Album Message du Migrant, by Big Makhou Djolof

MESSAGE DU MIGRANT

Message du migrant

Moi migrant, moi qui a vécu beaucoup de dangers de la migration irrégulière,
des arnaques, des massacres, des tortures, soit enfin emprisonnements, viols du calvaire.
J'ai un message et c'est le message du migrant.

Mon message va migrer dans les différents continents.
Oui, il est temps, et c'est le moment d'être prudent, et marche doucement.

Les jeunes qui meurent dans les voies de la migration irrégulière.
Des parents qui perdent leur fils,
Des épouses qui perdent leur mari,
Les enfants qui perdent leur père,
Et l'Afrique qui perd sa jeunesse.

La jeunesse africaine.
L'Afrique a besoin de nous.
Restons chez nous.
Mobilisons-nous pour bâtir une Afrique à nous.

Je veux une Afrique qui vit
Une Afrique avec ses jeunes qui ne fut jamais leur terre.
Une Afrique fière, qui a une jeunesse consciente,
une jeunesse capable de relever les défis.

L'Afrique avec ses ressources.
On a de vastes terres pour l'agriculture, l'élevage et autres.
Le soleil est là. Quoi de plus pour développer notre chère Afrique ?

Réussir ici, c'est possible.
Il y a des opportunités disponibles.
Allons vers l'information pour nous former, nous formaliser et oser entreprendre.

Maman ne repousse plus, pas de pression sociale.
Papa ne repousse plus, pas de pression sociale.
L'Afrique a besoin de moi. Elle a besoin de nous.

Jeunes Africains,
Restant pour bâtir notre Afrique.
Et stop la migration irrégulière.
Et stop la migration irrégulière et stop la migration irrégulière.

MON HISTOIRE

Les passeurs, dans leurs mon sanges,
Me faisait croire que là-bas c'est le paradis.

Moi migrant de retour,
je vous raconte mon histoire,

mon histoire, dans mes mélodies.

Je ne savais pas pourquoi,
je ne savais pas mamans,
que la migration irrégulière est si dangereuse.

Ils nous ont mis ont dangers,
jeunesse Africaines meurt par milliers dans l'océan.

C'est le message, message du migrant,
le message, message du migrant.
C'est le message, message du migrant,
le message, message du migrant.
C'est le message, message du migrant,
le message, message du migrant.

J'ai passé dans les voies de la migration irrégulière,
Tous ce que je vous dis, je l'ai vécu
En coup de route j'ai vu des jeunes Africaines,
Kidnappé, torturé, massacré, emprisonné
J'ai des filles violées
Ils meurent dans le désert, dans la mer
Ce qui ma fait mal
Maman Afrika continue de verser ces larmes

C'est le message, message du migrant
Le message, message du migrant
C'est le message, message du migrant
Le message, message du migrant
C'est le message, message du migrant
Le message, message du migrant

WAGNEKOUNA

Wagnekouna et matouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Wagnekouna et matouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Dotouma degg yoonu suuf geej ba delusi **doesn't want to hear about migrating by sea nor do it
again**

Ku dul appel wa Babylon boun ma gis ba teerusi

Niak tax nu xattaal ma suuf feel ma tuumal ma
Bagn tax am am jital ma

Gisutuma dajjalé li ma yorone dëku yonou Libie Italie Sandekou **I only had eye for getting the
money for the journey through Libya and Italy**

Niak xam fo dali waye
Wagnekouna dematouma diaratouko
Lay dee way souma soulounouko

Boun ma fay sax beggoutouma **Even if they will pay me, I don't want to [leave]**
Am doom sama ginaaw **had a baby after I left**
Xarouma **I won't kill myself**
Dotouma degg yoonu suuf geej ba delusi **doesn't want to hear about migrating by sea nor do it
again**

Sou dou wone nopal wa Babylon bougn ma gis ba teerusi
Wagnekouna et matouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Wagnekouna et matouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Dotouma degg yoonu suuf geej ba delusi
Kou done rappel wa Babylon bougn ma gis ba teerusi

Maam daneel wone sët yi
Boumou diamy maam bougn ko fel
Fekke dotou ma boré ci reerou clandestin
Est-ce que Babylon sax lane sama destin

Man damaa tiit ci biir la yone bett leundeum xel moor fiit dem
Ay ngooni ngoon dajj ak xeet bu nekk
Pays Afrique bou nekk
Kou nekk juge fu ne
Goor jigéen mag yu nek
Lidee lu jugo caso ci yoonou Libie tally
Dafa bari lool

La migration irreguliere
Xarouma té demouma guerre

Niak xam ma dug loolu ci li
Wagnekouna yessi sama askan
Yessi yessi yessi yessi yessi sama askan
Yessi sama askan

Wagnekouna e moutouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Wagnekouna e moutouma ndax diaaraatouko (diaaraatouko)
Dotouma degg yoonu suuf geej ba delusi
Rappel wa Babylon bougn ma gis ba teerusi

ÑIBISSI

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi **mom I am coming home**
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi **dad I am coming home**
Ndax bitim rew lima fi foogone amoul fi **because overseas was not what I thought it was**

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Ndax bitim rew lima fi foogone amoul fi

Dundu ma dane Africa
Liko gen yès lay dundu fi
Ligeey a ma bayi nio Africa
Liko gen yees lay nangu fi
Yoon bu diaroul yoon
Ndax amouma kayit
Ligeey bu baax
Fu ma dëk
Fanaan ci jardins yi (sleeping in gardens)
Taw bi sama kaw ba betsek
Fanaan ci suuf pont yi (sleeping under bridges)
Lu ne ma nan ma fadal
Lekk ci mbaliet yi (eating from the trash)

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi **mom I am coming home**
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi **dad I am coming home**
Ndax bitim rew lima fi foogone amoul fi **because overseas was not what I thought it was**

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi **mom I am coming home**
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi **dad I am coming home**
Ndax bitim rew lima fi foogone amoul fi **because overseas was not what I thought it was**

Diom moytoul ki
Fula moy nibisse
Maa ngi delusi
Ma ndiaboot gi gise
On peut reussir chez nous
Te lii men na ne
Gem gem rek la laaj
Avoir de la patience
On peut réussir chez nous
Te lii men na ne
Gem gem rek la laaj
L'Afrique a besoin ça

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Ndax bitim rew lima foogone amoul fi

Yaye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Baye boye maa ngi ñibisi
Ndax bitim rew lima foogone amoul fi

PRESSION SOCIALE

Damaa tukki a damaa daw
Ñu sagg ci noppi ni bow
Baam yaa ngi naax

Pression sociale di raam **social pressure is crawling**
Ma gènn dieuli ndam **I am becoming more successful**
wouti dëkk yi wann di naar di raam
fane laa tale dox di raam
nioko diene bonn **They accused him of being bad**
diene ko niakk diom **they accused him of being without courage**
taxaw def ko noon **they stood and made him their enemy**
mu feppou dieul yoon **that's when he left**
khep ko sofantele ko sonnal ko **underestimate him, annoy him**
niak du niak diom **without is not without shame**

den bign ma son amougnou baag ba ma fa gènn
yaye ñi ñoo ray sa doom bi taxaw di la diaale **mom, they killed your child and now they stand here**
offering condolences
No No No No a la pression sociale 5x

Saso bay xel wakhu niñi dalay top **if you pay attention to what people will say it will follow you**
Sula taxe defe lo mounoul def dangay flop **if it pushes you to do things you cannot do, you will fail**
Fajj soxlaam mere bi wala pa ak boy yi lu ñu chop **help your mom and dad and siblings to get food**

Andak sa sagoo bul si taye ba ngay job
 Ku gis nen rek nen neenangi
 Africain nga Africain wey done sa enemi **You are African, but Africans are your enemy**
 Dinagn la gemloo joro dara **They will make you believe you have nothing**
 Suñu societe yaw tamita dafa feke dangay naïve **our society will make you think you are naïve**
 Do gis loudoul gaal gaa ngi ni **you can only see the boats**
 Kou ne sa role **everyone has a role to play**
 Fook ni sa life baa ngi ni
 Li dey nurool
 Bis bu took di koy djangat li dey nurool
 beuri nañu mu yobé depression **a lot of people are depressed**
 bayi ma ma dundu bul ma tek pression **let me live don't put any pressure on me**
 No No No No a la pression sociale 5x

DEM

Bu diote yomb
 Diaw diaw ba danu
 Bu diote dina yomb lool
 Eh! Life bi xare la
 Gem sa bopp la
 Bu soté dara dotula djomb (2x)

Dem fan dem ndax lan **to go where To go why**
 Dem bayi askan **to go leave your country**
 Dem fekki ñan **to go leave and meet others**
 Dem fekki lan **to go leave and meet what**
 Tay la bakkan
 Tay la bakkan

Took na suba ba ngoon di xalaat **I spent from morning until afternoon thinking**
 Nima def ba sama gayi waye **about what I have done**
 Rew yeupa meti **all countries are hard**
 Fepp dafa meti **everywhere is hard**
 Dara xeujoul soti **not everything is sorted out**
 Ndox tourou ñu roti **water has been spilled, we fill it up again**
 Lu tax ma dem **why would I leave**
 Fan laa dieum **where should I go**
 Begg dem taxoula dem mena dem Tawara **wanting to leave doesn't mean you should/can leave**
 Dem mo takh a dem

Bu diote yomb
 Diaw diaw ba danu
 Bu diote dina yomb lool
 Eh! Life bi xare la
 Gem sa bopp la
 Bu soté dara dotula djomb (2x)

J' entends l' appel de la mort

Les --- de nos meres autours de ces corps qui busculent
 Elles ont mal pour toi
 Mal pourquoi
 Parce que juste mon frere tu as

Tout simplement fait le mauvais choix
Alume la light dans ta cabesait tu verra ce qui c' est possible
Doute pas ta force interieure pour une croyance inadmissible
Crois en toi et bats toi ici
Rien sur terre est vraiment easy
Nous sommes tous coupables arretons de jouer peezy

Bu diote yomb
Diaw diaw ba danu
Bu diote dina yomb lool
Eh! Life bi xare la
Gem sa bopp la
Bu soté dara dotula djomb (2x)

Bul bokk si ñu lene di sonnal
Dieul gaal dugg tugal ñu lay dajjal
Yague dugal taxula matal
Toogal fi xaar yalla dula gatal
Lo fi xaar dula fi fekk
Niaan na nga tekki **I pray that you'll be successful**
Toogal nga tekki **stay and you'll become successful**
Fallou yen nga goor goorlu **Fallou you are working hard**
Lepp di na diekh **everything will come to an end**

DOU YONE

Te xamoo fan nga dieum **without knowing where you'll be going**
Yaa ngi dem te xamoo lo fi fekki **you are leaving without knowing what you will find there**
Yaa ngi dem te sa dem bi diaroul ci yoon (ci yoon 3x) **you are leaving but the way you leave is not
the way [to go]**
Yaa ngi dem musiba men la dab si yaw **you are leaving but bad things can happen to you**

Ku taxawoo baay
Ferral rangoognu yaaye
Bo deme ci geej Africa kenn duko fay
Bakkan du ko jaay
Yoon bu dekk ray
Diot na ñu wakhtaan tay la tay

Afrique a besoin de changer
La migration irreguliere
Pertement des africains

Li nga wuti feneen xam nga niakoul fi
Gem gem bi ngay am felee def ko tekki fi
Am nagn suuf am naaj petit table
Petit oiseau fait son nid

Tep ko tep gen reer ligeeyal te nga xaar tekki fi
Bul xeeb benn metier fekkhel rekk fight gathie
Took tekki fi
Waw mena nek
Took tekki sa rew
Wawaw mena nek

Te xamoo fan nga dieum **without knowing where you'll be going**
Yaa ngi dem te xamoo lo fi fekki **you are leaving without knowing what you will find there**
Yaa ngi dem te sa dem bi diaroul ci yoon (ci yoon 3x) **you are leaving but the way you leave is not
the way [to go]**
Yaa ngi dem musiba men la dab si yaw **you are leaving but bad things can happen to you**

Bima deme la Fatimatou
Sama ginaw Khalil dioudo
Migrant bu dunde benn fils
Sa papa de sa yaay narone niak fils
Bu kaa ndaw sa doom narone gis Khalil
Narona ak sa wadji
Meunone naa des libie
Alhamdou bama nibissi
Waral ma wouy wouy wi ngir yeewi askan wi
Modou Laobe dem na
Dem naa te dotoul nibissi
Dotoul nibissi
Boskou dem na (dem na)
Te wooroul mou nibissi
Te wooroul mou nibissi

Do tekki sa rew
Wawaw men na nekk

Te xamoo fan nga dieum **without knowing where you'll be going**
Yaa ngi dem te xamoo lo fi fekki **you are leaving without knowing what you will find there**
Yaa ngi dem te sa dem bi diaroul ci yoon (ci yoon 3x) **you are leaving but the way you leave is not
the way [to go]**
Yaa ngi dem musiba men la dab si yaw **you are leaving but bad things can happen to you**

MBEUK MI

Gema lañuy degg mbeuk ... **we heard about mbeuk (when you bump your head)**
Te khamounou mbeuk bi lu mu done **without actually knowing what the bump was**
Djaay nagn lunuy fi amone **we sold everything we had**

Djugal djugal **stand up stand up**
Xamounou funuy dieum **we don't know where we're going**
Xamounou lunuy fa fekk **we don't know what we will find there**
Te yoon bi di gën di lëndëm **and the journey gets darker and darker**
Di gën di lëndëm **darker**
Di gën di lëndëm **darker**

Ñu ngiy ci yoon (ñu ngiy ci yoon) **we are on the way**
Bayi njaboot diaxlé toumranke **leaving the kids confused and alone**
Te yoon bi ñu jaar du yoonu tukki **and the way we went is not the way to travel**
Reer nañu **we got lost**

Jambaar yi dey moom wuti lañuy am **warriors looking for scraps**
Danuy dioumoon ci yoon lañuy dieulone **we were wrong about the journey/way we took**
Ñi nekk ci suuf ñé dee ci geej **some of us died at sea**
Ñi ñibissi ñe dañuy reer **those who returned home and others lost**

Jambaar yi dey moom wuti lañuy am **warriors looking for scraps**

Danuy dioumoon ci yoon lañuy dieulone **we were wrong about the journey/way we took**
Ñi nekk ci suuf ñé dee ci geej **some of us died at sea**
Ñi ñibissi ñe dañuy reer **those who returned home and others lost**

Xaliss bi ngay fay gaal **the money you pay to take the boat**
Mën na suxali suñu reew **you could invest in the country**

Geej amo banxass
Yakaaru reew nga tass
Joynañu ba dee waw
Beg nagn ba lool
Te lunuy fi wouti wone

Ñu nekk dugal beg nibisii
Bari nañu lool (lool)
Ndax meti lañuy dundu **we are living hardships**
Metina lool **very hard**

Jambaar yi dey moom wuti lañuy am **warriors looking for scraps**
Danuy dioumoon ci yoon lañuy dieulone **we were wrong about the journey/way we took**
Ñi nekk ci suuf ñé dee ci geej **some of us died at sea**
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Nous disons non à la migration irreguliere
Nous disons non à la migration irreguliere
Nous disons non à la migration irreguliere
Nous disons non à la migration irreguliere

GNOKO DOUNDOU

Bro nakamou? Mbaa yaa ngi ci jamm **bro how are you – I hope you are well**
Degg naa dugu nga tugal **I heard you got on the boat**
Yoon bi lañuy japp **that you took the journey**
Def ñu jamm **bring us peace**
Ñu mel ni
Ñu ñu dugal

Yomboul diaroul yoon
Mën ma rey niaata yoon
Ñu dajjé ak say-say **we were confronted by crazy people**
Yonou yokou ndool
Nga dee lépp cóol
Lu mala wakh sax
Ndax xam nga da nga bagnone
Wakhona la
Ndax yi ngi ni
Modou Laobé dee la geej
Yayou bayam
Doom dji mujj reer
Man ak samay morom
Ñibissi nañu ci reew

Ñi pat ñi lag ñi taggo sene xel
Dimbali ñibissi naa
Yewou naa
Took diem tekki fi
Bokk ci ndaw yi
Jeriñ reew mi

Dugnouko defaat **We won't do it again**
Bokkatul ci xalaat **It's no part of our thoughts**
Ku ñu bëggone yobowaat **Who wants to bring us back (overseas)**
Di nañu dàgg baat **We will interrupt (their speech)**

Do tekki fi **Why not succeed here**
Waw mën nekk **Yes it is possible**
Do rekki sa reew **Why not succeed in your home country**
Waw waw mën nekk **Yes, yes it is possible**

Dugnouko defaat **We won't do it again**
Bokkatul ci xalaat **It's no part of our thoughts**
Ku ñu bëggone yobowaat **Who wants to bring us back (overseas)**
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Waw waw mën nekk **Yes, yes it is possible**

Hey bro! yagena ci reewu tugal
Jàngal ma sene lakk man ci camp bi
Lañu ma dalal
Niaari att ma took di xaar
Ñu woo ma commission
Ñu tekk ci niaari weer ñu woo ma
Nè ma negatif
Ci la gadaay Italie pour dem espagne
Ma ngi ci wagon yi di risquer ba biir Marseille
Alka yi jàpp ba ñu prison centre tribunal
Enquête ñu ba noppi da ñi jalal

Iow bo amo kayit do mën am contrat
Té bo amo contrat do mën am kayit
Amna ñi di takk jabar ngir am kayit
Amna ñi di jënd contrat pour am kayit
Amna ñi di fanaan ci buntu banque yi
Mais amna ñi di jalwaan ci supermercado yi
Dem ba padre men took ramtarxatal medico

Dugnouko defaat **We won't do it again**
Bokkatul ci xalaat **It's no part of our thoughts**
Ku ñu bëggone yobowaat **Who wants to bring us back (overseas)**
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Do rekki sa reew **Why not succeed in your home country**
Waw waw mën nekk **Yes, yes it is possible**

Transcription of the song *Dialé* by Senny Camara

so many young lives lost in the ocean!
so many young dead in the ocean!
so many children died in these oceans!

see how they are trying to stop them, bullied and isolated
they're neither here nor there
feeling oppressed everywhere
neither from here nor from there
they are oppressed everywhere

I'm so sorry for you
Africa I'm so sorry for you

so many children died in these oceans
So many children died in these oceans

they are being killid in Libya
turns them into slaves in libya
neither from here nor from there
neither from here nor from there

I'm so sorry for you
Africa I'm so sorry for you

Syria I'm so sorry for you
sudan I'm so sorry for you
somalia I'm so sorry for you
Eritrea I'm so sorry for you
Ethiopia I'm so sorry for you
Afghanistan I'm so sorry for you
nigeria I'm so sorry for you
I'm so sorry for you

if we knew could know of the future, we could prevent
if we knew could know of the future, we could prevent
But God works in his own mysterious ways

I'm so sorry for you
I'm so sorry for you
Africa I'm so sorry for you

I really am so sorry for you

Ablaye niang, sileyman danso, samuel otoru
nuru dumbia, fatoumata silla, oumar diallo
nawel sabibi, faysal imran, alian kurdy

All of them dwell in the ocean now
All of them dwell in the ocean now

Let's go back to humanity, treat each other,
Behave towards each other, as humans.
Stop killing each other, stop mistreating people
Stop chasing those looking for help.

Color, race, country, where ever you come from, you're still human
You're no different from me, no different from them, you're no different from anyone else, for as
long as you breathe, you're one like me.