

Hamidou Dia, 2015,
Trajectoires et pratiques migratoires des Haalpulaaren du
Sénégal. Socio-anthropologie d'un « village multi-situé »,
Préface de Jean Copans, Paris : L'Harmattan

ALICE BELLAGAMBA*

Over the last ten years, so much has been written on Senegalese migrations that each new publication faces the challenge of providing fresh ethnographic evidence and novel theoretical perspectives. We know about the long-term historical dynamics and the conjunctures that have triggered the geographical mobility of Senegalese youths since the colonial period. We know about Senegalese migrants' life in Paris and other French cities during the second part of the twentieth century, and the ways they invested in the capital city of Dakar and in their home villages. We know about the sense of adventure of the first Senegalese migrants, who reached the Sierra Leone diamond fields in the 1950s, and about the frustrations of contemporary youths that cope with the practical impossibility of travelling to Western countries in a regular way. We know about the diasporic role of religious brotherhoods, the increasing feminization of Senegalese migrations, the migrants' involvement in politics and development and their plans for return. What else is there to discuss then? The limit of most recent research is that it is fragmented into many different case studies, and principally from the urban areas. Hamadou Dia's book corrects this trend through an ethnographically dense and historically accurate understanding of the meanings and economic relevance of migrations from the point of view of a haalpulaar community of the Middle Senegal River Valley, which he fictively calls Ngaarejam. Building on the tradition of Sahelian scholars, who are both observers and participants of the diasporic life of their home country, Dia reconstructs seventy years of national and international mobility and their impact on rural ideas of self, status and social presence.

Known as Futa Toro, the region where Ngaarejam lies has been the cradle to generations of international migrants since the 1950s. Haalpulaar youths moved out of their villages, and began to reach France in a period in which Senegalese agriculture was growing thanks to good rains and the favorable economic juncture of the 1950s. When the growth halted in the course of

* Principal Investigator of "Shadows of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond. A Historical Anthropology (SWAB)", European Research Council under the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013), ERC Grant agreement n° 313737.

Sahelian droughts of the 1970s, haalpulaar diaspora intensified. Through oral history and ethnography, Dia carefully reconstructs this historical turn. The Senegalese, Mauritanian and Malian governments tried to counter the droughts through the construction of two big dams on the Senegal River, and the promotion of irrigated agriculture. Although the original purpose was to create an alternative to migrations, migrations turned out to be crucial to the agricultural development of Futa Toro. When in the 1990s environmental deterioration further compromised the agricultural sector, it became clear that the time of local solutions to the problems of social and cultural reproduction had ended definitively. Only migration could grant the economic sustainability of Futa Toro communities.

As Jean Copans remarks in the preface, the quality of this book stands precisely in the ability to use migration to raise classic anthropological questions on the making and unmaking of society: how have haalpulaar communities countered the erosion of the material and cultural basis of their social life? What have they done to ensure continuity in spite of dramatic environmental, political and economic changes? Contemporary European migration policies and migrants' daily lives in Europe concern Dia only as far as they allow him to understand the intimate transgenerational dynamics of haalpulaar migrations. The concept of "multi-sited village" helps him describe the transnational trajectory of Ngaarejam without losing sight of the rural context where the all story began, and where it continues to unfold today.

The book consists of three parts. The first reconstructs the evolution of Ngaarejam diaspora, starting with the students and the low-skilled laborers that reached France in the 1950s and 1960s. Carefully, Dia explores the innovative marital choices of this generation of migrants and their attempts to part with the village life-style. Oral history provides him with the clues to explore the role of political clienteles in the establishment of the first migratory networks. The unit of analysis is neither the individual nor the community but the transnational ramifications of Ngaarejam families, their sense of belonging to Ngaarejam itself, and their capacity to facilitate the reproduction of the diaspora in spite of increasingly restrictive European migration policies. What Dia calls the Senegalese "mobility crisis" stands at the crossroad of two different processes: "the increasing difficulty of the conditions of entry and living in western countries" and the "deterioration of livelihoods in the home country" (p. 191). Both processes have compromised upward social mobility. The second part of the book focuses on family histories, while the third discusses the impact of the diaspora on the local and national political area.

Dia's ethnography may not catch the attention of anthropologists and specialists of migrations interested in the humanitarian implications of contemporary regimes of mobility. Surely, however, it earns an audience among

scholars eager to learn about the internal transformations of the migrants' countries of origin, and about Senegal in particular. The attention for the terms and the thick idiomatic expressions used by his haalpulaar interlocutors to talk about migration is commendable. The first target of men who left Ngaarejam because of the 1970s droughts was to counter the risk of *barnme kippido*, literally the "pot upside down", a pulaar expression that describes families who had not ingredients to cook their daily meal. Their only choice was to rely on the generosity of relatives and neighbors. Migrants of that generation earned the title of *tiniido*, a "valiant person", if their regular remittances freed their families from the shame of dependence.

Literature on communities of the Senegal River Valley has long underlined the resilience of nineteenth century statutory distinctions and class structure in the haalpulaar diaspora¹. Dia enriches this already developed discussion with the assessment of the interlaced dynamics of class, geographical mobility and social emancipation. He also discloses the economies of rank that are the byproduct of seventy years of national and international migrations: "as much as some families stand at the top of the social hierarchy which produces migrations", (p. 272) losers crowd to the bottom together with people who have never really succeeded to migrate. The failure of a migration trajectory fuels comparison with families without migrants, the *jom jale en* – "the owners of the hoe", people who carve a living out of Ngaarejam agricultural lands thanks to the support of diaspora. It is rare to find a detailed account of the causes that may jeopardize the migrant's career. Dia opens a window on this delicate issue by documenting four stories of failure, and the associated experiences of social debasement. Expulsion from Europe, lack of documents, marital problems and children's difficulty of integration in the new context may comprise dramatically the social and economic benefits of migration. Although Dia does not draw broader conclusions out of his rich ethnographic material, others can do it on his behalf. His book testifies to the contribution of classic anthropological approaches (based on long-term fieldwork, a robust knowledge of the local languages, and curiosity for all aspects of social life) to migration studies. It also helps to think beyond migration by providing evidence of the broader economies of emancipation and social debasement that underwrite human aspirations of geographical mobility.

1 For instance: Diop, A.B., (1965), *Société toucouleur et migration, l'immigration toucouleur à Dakar*, Dakar, Institut français d'Afrique noire ; Adams. A., (1974), *Prisoners in exile : Senegalese workers in France*, *Race* 16, 2, pp. 157-179; Schmitz, J. Jean, Humery, M.-E., (2008), « La vallée du Sénégal entre (co) développement et transnationalisme », *Politique africaine* 1, pp. 56-72.