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<PQ>“You know what they say about belief: they say it can lift mountains. I’m not saying that young people who want to leave are unreasonable, but they follow their reason.”

<AT>It’s Only a Matter of Hope: Rethinking Migration Decision-Making in Contemporary Senegal; Between Lived Immobilities, Development Interventions, and Social Inequalities[1]

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<ABS>This article stems from ethnographic research conducted in three Senegalese contexts: Louga, Diaobé, and the Saloum Islands. The underemployment of young people, deagrarianization, and other phenomena are intertwined with a growing criminalization of displacement and an irregularization of international migration. By debunking the idea that the processes of deciding to migrate are linear, we propose an alternative understanding of what choice means in the context of contemporary migration. We are not asserting that migrant agency is absent, but we argue that uncertainty is often the norm, rather than the exception, and that we need a more dynamic and sophisticated notion of choice as a lens for understanding why and how people migrate. The relationships among mobility-restriction regimes, development interventions, and the individualized way in which people represent their lived (im)mobilities affect migration choices in all three contexts. For those we encountered, it is the present that looks uncertain and the future that offers hope.

<H1>Introduction

It is just after 2 a.m. on a February night when we pull up alongside the Oil Libya Petrol Station on Route National n.2 outside Louga, Senegal. This intersection connects the state road that reaches Saint-Louis from Dakar and continues to the border with Mauritania, with one of the main streets of the city of Louga. Here, in the middle of the night, dozens of taxis

and motorcycle taxis are parked along the road waiting for customers. Some stalls and street vendors are selling fresh fruits, candy, and cigarettes. Several women or girls are making hot coffee or reselling bags of water. The halogens of the Petrol Station illuminate the area, creating a white halo. Cheikh, a thirty-eight-year-old man, has arrived from Mbacké Baol about one hundred kilometers further south. He is here in the hope of intercepting a lift to Morocco. He is accompanied by Djibril, a local acquaintance, who has traveled the route linking Senegal, Mauritania, and Morocco numerous times during his attempts to reach Europe. Cheikh relies on Djibril's indications. At this time of year, many Moroccan trucks drive north after unloading oranges and mandarins in the capital city. With a little luck and a few tens of thousands of F.CFA Francs, one of these trucks will give him a lift to Morocco without intermediate stops. However, after several hours of waiting, hope fades, and Djibril advises Cheikh to choose an alternative plan: many private cars are headed for the border and will agree to give him a lift. At this hour, however, or perhaps on this particular day, very few cars pass. None of these agrees to take him on board, declining the requests made by Cheikh with a broken voice, perhaps because of the fear of departure. Another sign of his growing anxiety is the repeated swearing against his country and his city: "Mbacké! Nobody helps you there! You have to go crazy!" or "I could do anything so don't stay here!" Around 5 a.m., Djibril suggests a final solution: by dawn, the first bus to Saint-Louis, or even better to Richard Toll, further north, would pass by there. If Cheikh were to take it, he could start the journey by breaking it into many small stages. In the end, Cheikh got on a bus that would leave him at the intersection between Richard Toll and Rosso, Senegal, a few meters from the border with Mauritania. Hoping to get on track, he falls back on the prospect of a long series of changes, checks, bribes, and intermediate steps that would take him to Casablanca in about three days. With his backpack, a plastic bag containing some clothing and about 100,000

F.CFA (US$75) in his pocket, he greeted us and embarked on his second emigration to Morocco.

By debunking the idea that there are linear processes of migration decision-making and clear roadmaps to follow, we propose in this article an alternative understanding of what choice means in the context of contemporary Senegalese migration. We are not asserting that migrant agency is absent, but we argue that choice is a more complex concept in practice than is often represented in theory, that hope and uncertainty are often the norm, rather than the exception, and that we need a more diverse, dynamic, and sophisticated notion of choice as a lens for understanding when, why, and how people migrate or stay. This article stems from ethnographic and comparative research conducted in Senegal in three emigration contexts: the city of Louga, largely dependent on a long-standing remittance economy; the cross-border town of Diaobé in the southeastern part of the country and its rural hinterland; and the Saloum Islands, close to the Gambia border, traditionally based on a declining fishing economy and recently opened to global ecotourism. Louga is a historical basin of the Senegalese diaspora toward Europe, Diaobé is a frontier city strongly linked to cross-border exchanges and mobility, and the Saloum Islands are traditionally uninclined to intercontinental migration. Today, however, these territories are among the centers of an increasing youth emigration, revealing a changing inclination of younger generations to migration, transversal to local contexts and historicities. Louga is a city of about one hundred thousand inhabitants, located two hundred kilometers northeast of Dakar, in the northern part of Peanut Basin and along the Dakar–Thiès–Saint-Louis axis. It is the country’s least poor city after the capital (ANSD 2013a). Its economy is deeply linked to remittances from migrants in Europe. Since the 1980s it has become one of the main emigration areas, together with the Senegal River Valley, the Djourbel Region, and the capital (Riccio 2005; Robin, Lalou, and Ndiaye 1999; Tall 2008; Tandian 2008). Today, it has more than twelve thousand

surveyed immigrants (ANSD 2013b), more than 10 percent of the national population. Diaobé, in contrast, is a small urban center of about thirty thousand inhabitants, located in Haute-Casamance almost seven hundred kilometers southeast of Dakar. Dioabé is located about twenty kilometers north of the border with Guinea and thirty kilometers from the Gambia, at the center of an agropastoral region. Its location near both borders has over time favored the importance of its weekly market (*loumo*), which attracts many cross-border businesses and trades. But the economic lung of the area is constituted by the Anambé Basin. Finally, the islands of the Saloum delta are inhabited by Niominka (Serer) and Socé fishermen. Located in the central and western part of the country along the Atlantic coast, about 250 kilometers from the capital, it is isolated, poorly connected to the main road networks, and lacking in basic infrastructure. Fishing is the traditionally prevalent economic activity, but environmental changes and dwindling piscatorial resources are causing it to decline. Here, as in Diaobé but not Louga, young people's intercontinental migration is a recent phenomenon, which began in the 2000s with the first waves of clandestine emigration.

In these contexts, we documented the stories of many migrants, aspiring migrants and young people in relation to their mobility experiences. The notion of "young people" needs some clarification, particularly in the context of African studies. This category has been analyzed in different historical, analytical, and ethnographical perspectives (Abbink and Van Kessel 2005; Argenti 2007; Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006; Honwana and De Boeck 2005). From the 1990s and 2000s, youth emerge strongly in many African contexts as an increasingly problematic political category. The socioeconomic consequences of structural-adjustment policies transformed African youth into the protagonists of new forms of marginalization, endowed with new languages, codes, and ruptures of social logics and power relations. In Senegal, youth underemployment, mass urbanization, and political configurations have transformed youth into one of the main "fear[s] of public space" (Diouf

and Collignon 2001). In this article, we adopt an analytical definition, inspired by the notion of "social cadets" (Bayart 1979), referring to those who fall into that subordinate category who have not yet reached adulthood—a category transferable to social groups and classes not based on age.

Access to our interlocutors therefore took place mainly through networks and peer groups formed around religious affiliations (within the Mouride brotherhood in Louga) and informal professional associations (motorcycle taxi drivers in Diaobé and Louga), and a formal one (fishermen in Saloum and return-migrant associations in Dioabé). These networks and groups have given us access mainly to young males whose aspirations or decision to migrate and experience of social (im)mobility and vulnerability remain deeply rooted in a gendered dimension. In addition, development actors, policymakers and local notables were interviewed in an attempt to describe the effects of development interventions on the people's decisions to move or stay.[1] To overcome a look exclusively turned at economic factors capable of explaining the decisions to move, we have opted for a collection of qualitative primary data on the way in which people put into words their aspirations, their projects, and their personal and collective perspectives on development and social success. Yet we have observed, as evidenced by the anecdote above, the way in which these generate fragmented and indeterminate forms of spatial and "social navigation" (Vigh 2009) by embracing hope and uncertain trajectories (Di Nunzio 2019).

Like many African countries within the contemporary globalized economy, postcolonial Senegal witnessed intermittent economic crisis, structural-adjustment plans under the control of the International Monetary Fund, neoliberal reforms (Diop 2008; Melly 2016) with an increasing disengagement of the state and growing privatization, and rising social inequality affecting intergenerational relationships (Gomez-Perez and LeBlanc 2012). Groundnuts, which from the colonial period have been the basic product of the agricultural

sector, crucial to budgetary and external revenue, have shown their inability to nourish the peasantry confronting the pressure of a corrupt state and the monetarist policies of the adjustment plan. The whole situation has produced discontent among poorer strata of society. In the last decades, urban youths have become protagonists of this frustration. Youth disaffection with politics after the failure of social movements produced new waves of emigrants in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when students were comparing themselves with preceding generations, those who could count on getting government jobs because of their degrees; they saw themselves as a "lost generation" (Cruise O'Brien 2003).

Nowadays, phenomena such as mass unemployment and underemployment, deagrarianization, and environmental changes are intertwined with a growing criminalization of displacement and an irregularization of trans-Saharan and intercontinental migration. Restrictive policies are closely related to development interventions, most of which are conceived and implemented as forms of a soft "struggle against irregular migration" with the aim of "keeping them in their place" (Bakewell 2008). Young people continue to pursue the hope of social affirmation at home, just as they mix and overlap paths of mobility and immobility. We argue that the relationship between mobility-restriction regimes, development interventions, and the increasingly individualized way in which young people represent their lived (im)mobilities affect migration choices in all three contexts. In the rest of the article, after exploring the story of L's friend D, we will illustrate how Africanist approaches to mobility may inform and improve migration studies. Then we will critically discuss the migration-development nexus by looking at development discourses and practices and their connections to migration choices. Finally, we will conclude by exploring a hidden process of individualization of migration decision-making and of facing uncertainty.

<H1>A Story on the Edge of (Im)mobility

Like many people of his generation, Djibril left school prematurely. From an early age, he had identified his professional vocation as mechanic apprentice, specializing in motorcycles. His father is a bricklayer, who has always dissuaded his children from following such a humble destiny. In Louga, his hometown, Djibril opened his garage in 2005, after reaching the age of eighteen. Things were going well enough that he was able to get married in 2009. But from that point on, the situation started to change. The impact of economic crisis was starting to be felt, especially in Louga, where most families depended on remittances from migrants in Europe. Djibril's responsibilities had increased, and, as his father's firstborn son, he had to look after his new family as well as his parents' household. He decided to embark on his first migratory journey, choosing the Cape Verde Islands, long a site of emigration to Europe and Senegal. During the 2000s, these islands had revived their economies thanks to tourism and soon became an important destination for Senegalese migrants, who could access them freely with a simple passport. From 2010 to 2012, Djibril moved to the island of Sal, where he began as a peddler. On his return to Louga, he found that his wife had died giving birth to a daughter. The following year, 2014, Djibril decided to leave for Mauritania. In Nouakchott, about a day's journey from Louga, he could count on the presence of relatives in his father's lineage. Here he resumed being a mechanic and specialized in the repair of quads and high-powered motorcycles. He often managed to return to Louga but stayed there for about four years.

His aspirations to migrate to Europe had already begun in his teens. Many relatives on his mother's side were living in Spain and Italy. The idea of emigrating had matured during his stay in Cape Verde. His situation in Mauritania allowed him to live in dignity. He was able to help his father, as his mother had died shortly after his departure, but the idea of continuing toward Europe never stopped pushing him forward. He attempted to reach Libya via Mali, but he turned back after reaching Bamako. Between 2018 and 2020, he tried four

times to embark from the coast of Morocco. He lived and worked as a peddler in Casablanca and Marrakesh to accumulate the money needed for the trip. He tried in vain to pass through Laayoune and Dakhla to reach the Canary Islands. His most successful attempts departed from Tangier. But none of these succeeded. Again and again he returned to the city, where he worked as a driver of cars of Senegalese migrants returning home from Europe by land. Since he knew Mauritania well and had a driving license that was valid in Morocco, he would guide them to the border with Senegal. In late 2019, he returned to Louga, where we met him.

Despite the money wasted trying to reach Spain, he had accumulated enough in the last year to buy two Jakarta-brand scooters, one for himself and one for his younger brother. The latter, according to him, was using his as a moto-taxi to raise enough money to emigrate to Europe. Even Djibril, like many other boys in Senegalese urban centers outside the capital, engaged in this activity, but his main activities were supervising the work of apprentices in his garage and trading motorcycles found in containers in Dakar and often reassembled with his own hands. His now elderly father had placed many responsibilities on his shoulders as the firstborn. A little while after Cheikh’s departure, Djibril set about preparing a new journey to Morocco. “Last week,” he stated in February 2020, “some friends called from Marrakesh to tell me there is a new clandestine way into Europe.”

<H1>Migration, Mobility, and Immobility among Youth in Senegal

African studies since the early 2000s has recorded numerous relevant suggestions to understand international migration following an emic perspective strictly connected to everyday life (Bredeloup 2008; De Bruijn, Van Dijk, and Foeken 2001; Fouquet 2008; Hahn and Klute 2007; Riccio 2005; Schmitz 2008). Migration and mobility cannot be studied without recognizing how they produce relationships whose center lies precisely in emigration contexts, and it would not be economic conditions that push or pull people to migrate (Hahn

and Klute 2007). This etiological tendency, which seeks to explain migration phenomena using structural push-pull factors, is widespread in migration studies, as well as in common sense and media and policymakers' discourse, but we should avoid thinking of migration in terms of a breaking of social ties or of spatial detachment. Instead, we need to look at how it creates, strengthens, or transforms the bonds between people—a relational dimension that has guided the theories of transnationalism and translocalism (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc 1992; Grillo and Riccio 2004; Vertovec 2009). Yet we need to go further by addressing the motivations, movements, and strategies of migrants and diasporic actors (Hahn and Klute 2007). Analysis of "cultures of migration" (Cohen 2004) should emphasize the importance of not only patterns of mobility, but also conflicts, pressures, and frustrations, in the contexts of origin and destination. It is therefore necessary to adopt a concept as processual as possible of the notion of culture to bring out the whole dynamic and interstitial dimension of such cultures (Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017; Turco and Camara 2018).

Young Senegalese perspectives of the future are strongly intertwined with the logics that govern kinship solidarity, gender identities, and models of social affirmation. The importance of social success and recognition (Banégas and Warnier 2001) animates their lives through continuous struggle to "produce personhood" and avoid "social death" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 273–74). For Mourides, it has meant the exploration of global circuits of trade and labor migration. Money drawn from such circuits are reinvested in material wealth and social relationships: men build houses and make offerings to religious guides, whereas women accumulate and circulate clothes in rituals, and all struggle to enhance their status from the threat of shame induced by economic volatility (Buggenhagen 2012). At the same time, the monetization of social relations is strengthened, with migrants wondering if their importance in Senegal is measured by what they can provide financially, rather than by what they have to offer socially and personally (Buggenhagen 2012, 97–98).

Senegalese young people, particularly males approaching adulthood (Prothmann 2017), are charged with antagonistic expectations and pressures (Willems 2014), as shown by Djibril's situation. On the one hand, it is essential to seek money to empower oneself (Gaibazzi 2015); on the other hand, it is necessary to contribute economically to the life and well-being of one's home and household (Buggenhagen 2012). Becoming an adult means participating in the expenses, ceremonies, rituals, and conflicts of the home. In the logic of social reproduction, it means perpetuating one's home and household through one's social presence and permanence, including visits, remittances, and investments; it means taking care of people and the bonds that make up one's social networks (Gaibazzi 2015; Whitehouse 2012). Tension between expectations and pressures has long been resolved by young men's circular, labor, and international migration (Amselle 1976; Manchuelle 1997; Meillassoux 1975).

The migration policies of the European Union of the last twenty years have radically transformed the "mobility regimes" (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013), particularly regarding cross-border migratory movements through the Sahara and beyond. Many apparatuses of migration control and repression have been transferred to African states or international organizations (Brachet 2018; Gaibazzi, Bellagamba, and Dunnwald 2017), thus increasing the "business of bordering Europe" (Andersson 2014). This has led to a growing criminalization of displacement and an irregularization of migration out of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and Africa. In this sense, there is a tendency to distinguish regional cross-border movements, such as livelihoods or labor mobility, from cross-border movements north of the Sahara—which would justify the use of the expression "international migration" (Adepoju 2006). Yet Dibril and others like him see no such distinction. He does not define himself as a real migrant (a *modou modou* or a *kaw man*), since he has never reached Europe, and his mobility experience has led him to live and work in many more countries than his aspirations or migratory projects contain. What appears

evident is therefore the contradictory effect of the current mobility regimes that have compressed the space of so-called regular movements but expanded the map of irregular trajectories. In fact, the latter continue to proliferate, as the latest projects made by Djibril attest, precisely to circumvent controls, repression, detentions, and deportations. So, if mobility in West Africa "is engrained in the history, daily life[,] and experiences of people" (De Bruijn, van Dijk, and Foeken 2001, 1; see also Beauchemin 2018; Bilger and Kraler 2005;Fall 2016), what would characterize our age would not be so much the movements on a global scale, but obstacles to the mobility of a large part of the population (Carling 2002).

<FC1>Figure 1.

In contexts that boast a long history of internal migration and mobility, such as West Africa, people live in a condition of a growing discrepancy between their aspiration to migrate and the ability to cross borders between states and continents (Kleist and Thorsen 2017). In Cape Verde, the experience of discrepancy makes for "involuntary immobility" (Carling 2002), a category including, in addition to restrictions related to political regimes, variables such as access to migratory networks and scarce economic resources or even individual characteristics related to age, gender and level of education. The aspiration-ability model, further refined (Carling 2013; Carling and Schewel 2018), allows us to overcome the idea, often widespread in migration studies, that people who decide to move following a rational calculation of costs and benefits can do so; however, "many migration desires remain unfulfilled, but nevertheless have consequences for individuals and communities" (Carling and Schewel 2018, 945). The notion of ability has been enriched by that of capability, a notion introduced by Amartya Sen in *Development and Freedom* (1999), which defines capabilities as people's ability to achieve what they want to do or be. Capability and ability

have been considered interchangeable notions (Dimitriadi 2017; Jayasuriya 2014; Randell 2016), but the main difference between them lies in the fact that while the ability to migrate represents a central component of any migration path, the capability to do so refers instead to a possibility, a value of freedom, which is independent of an actual aspiration or project. In this sense, the aspiration-capability framework, an extension of the aspiration-ability model, conceives migration as "an intrinsic part of broader processes of social transformation" (De Haas 2014, 4)—in other words, of development. However, these models, taking an etic (outsider's) stance, view immobility as a substantial obstacle to movement. The social sciences and anthropology in particular are increasingly skeptical of such a dichotomy between movement and stasis (Gaibazzi 2015; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Heil et al. 2017; Rockefeller 2011). Adopting an emic approach means considering mobility and immobility as poles of an experiential continuum, "outcomes of a relation" (Adey 2010, 18).

An invitation to rethink the migration decision-making process through a relational and actor-centered approach, attentive to the contextual dialectic between stasis and movement, also comes from some geographers. The importance of the intertwining between cultural processes and the processes of subjectivation of migrants brings out the centrality of the decision-making process (Halfacree and Boyle 1993; King 2012; Zhang 2018). However, a decision is not just a single act, undertaken by individuals or small groups (like households) in a completely abstract way from any other context, but an act "understood as a differentiated, affectively registered, transformative, and ongoing actualization of potential against a horizon of undecidability in which past, present, and future fold together in complex ways," not necessarily "located within the limits of a self-contained, sovereign subject" (McCormack and Schwanen 2011, 2801). Considering decisions as processes and not single linear events (Zhang 2018) helps us understand why attempts to migrate persist over time, sometimes repetitively in a way that stubbornly challenges the ability of mobility regimes to

govern people’s lives. Migration can therefore be seen not as an “act of movement,” but as the “production of stasis and staying in migration” (Zhang 2018, 200).

The story of Djibril—always poised between mobility and immobility, movement and stasis, departures and returns, aspirations and adaptations—illustrates the need to speak rather of “im/mobility trajectories” (Schapendonk, Bolay and Dahinden 2021); in this sense, we embrace the proposal for demigranticizing mobility (Dahinden 2016). We cannot in fact separate the migration journey from the forms of mobility that precede and follow it (Heil et al. 2017; Schapendonk, Bolay, and Dahinden 2021). Our perspective accepts this proposal to blur the experiential boundaries of migration to demigranticize mobility by first questioning the im/mobility trajectories in the voices of young people and in close relation to emigration contexts. Regarding the latter, it is in particular the effect of development interventions on migration decision-making that interests us.

<H1>Development Co-optation and Resource Collection

> <EXT>We, Ministers and Representatives of the Governments of West African States, meeting on 13 October 2000, in Dakar, Republic of Senegal, at the West African Conference on ‘the Participation of Migrants in the Development of their Country of Origin’, . . . declare that we are committed to: . . . Developing poverty alleviation programmes in the areas of origin, in partnership with migrants, with the aim of *reducing the inclination to emigrate*. . . . *Accelerating* the West African regional integration process, with emphasis on *the free movement of persons*, the right of residence and establishment. (Dakar Declaration 2000, 2–5)</EXT>

The Dakar Declaration begins a new season in the development and governance policies of migration flows in West Africa. It unambiguously proposes the etiological correlation

between poverty and migration; it is therefore based on the hypothesis according to which by reducing the former through appropriate development strategies, one can (and must) reduce the latter. It makes the paradoxical proposal of accelerating freedom of movement within ECOWAS while aiming to reduce the inclination to migrate outside ECOWAS. This paradox reveals an essentialization of migration through the demarcation line mentioned above: that which separates sub-Saharan regional cross-border mobility, considered *natural* and *regular*, and a true "international migration," made up of trans-Saharan and intercontinental movements (Adepojou 2006; D'Errico and Di Giuseppe 2018). This approach is largely dominated by the economic prism and the sedentary lifestyle paradigm, aimed at explaining the decisions to move outside the regional perimeter; however, we have to wait for the 2006 wave of clandestine departures for the first state program openly aimed at proposing strategies to fight migration through development: the Plan REVA (*Retour vers l'Agriculture*), also supported by the Spanish government (Maggi and Sarr 2020; Martinez Bermejo and Rivero Rodriguez 2008; Willems 2008). The idea underlying this macrointervention is based on a hypothesis according to which candidates for "irregular" emigration are mainly young people living in rural contexts in crisis, who would return to their natural economic activities on condition of being accompanied by efficient and adequate development poles (Oya and Ba 2013). Such a vision of development has become dominant in most of the interventions in recent years, including short-term and small-scale projects funded by international and local NGOs. This vision represents the other face of border-control security policies and inaugurates an impressive management approach to migration flows (Bakewell 2008; Kabbanji 2013). In doing so, the EU and African states, collaborating with international organizations, have reified and mainstreamed the migration issue, transferring it into development interventions and aid programs for Africa (Gabrielli 2007). What a careful ethnographic look at the *terroirs historiques*[2] of the contexts of emigration

reveals today is that these paradigms have coopted local and institutional actors, guiding the discourse and practices of some return migrants and young people.

The three contexts differ also from the viewpoint of development interventions. In Louga, state-led interventions, NGOs, and international partnerships are balanced, and important among them is the role played by decentralized cooperation networks connecting the city to contexts where the diaspora stands out. The main sectors of intervention are currently education and vocational training, socioeconomic support, and microfinance, as well as transfer of skills and capacity building. In Diaobé State, interventions in territorial planning date back to the years of socialist policies, with the creation of the Société de Développement Agricole et Industriel du Sénégal and the Société de Développement et des Fibres Textiles in 1974. These institutions still constitute the main technical framework structures for agricultural development, particularly in the sector of rice cultivation and cotton production. In Diaobé, the presence of IOM and some NGOs, engaged in socioeconomically supporting projects for migrants returning from North Africa, is also important. Finally, for some years, Saloum has been an area of ecotourism, which has developed together with public interventions aimed at protecting marine areas and mangroves. In this region, the state is the main player in development, with interventions that focus on fishing and protecting the environment and its biodiversity. Here, unlike Diaobé and Louga, development interventions are not animated by the objective of fighting migration. This shows that the tendency to bend development policies and interventions within the migration issue is proportional to the presence of interventions led by partnerships and international actors. This may be conducive to the argument according to which the presence of international partners, donors, or actors would orient development policies toward irregular migration issues by coopting local institutions and actors.

<FC2>Figure 2.

Despite the indicated differences, we have documented similarities among these *terroirs historiques*. The most relevant is a further consequence of development co-optation. It consists in the fact that, especially in Louga and Diaobé, most interventions emphasize individual initiative and responsibility as alternative solutions to migration. These translate into projects and programs focused on the neoliberal guiding categories of self-employment, entrepreneurship, and agency (Gershon 2011). Directors of the major educational and vocational training centers of Diaobé and Louga reported:

<EXT>Today, young people have turned towards self-employment. . . . It is a whole package of technical and managerial support that is provided to young people. . . . These interventions have an impact on young people. They help encourage them to stay and succeed at home. It is a question of fixing them in their territory for the reintegration of return migrants. (A. B., Diaobé, April 2020)</EXT>

<EXT>There are young people coming out of here who don't think about traveling [*toukki* 'to migrate'] but who have created their own business. . . . If we had a lot of centers like this, the problem would be under control. Unfortunately, it's not the case. (F. N., Louga, January 2020)</EXT>

From the point of view of institutional actors of development, the reproduction of such rhetoric can partly be explained by a logic of fundraising and resource collection, essentially to attract external donors. Such categories end up shaping and naturalizing neoliberal discourses, practices, and moral models, as in many other African contexts (Bornstein and Redfield 2011Englund 2006; Piot 2010;). This involves appropriation and,

again, co-optation so widespread that these categories are well rooted also among the people involved in the interventions. A thirty-year-old social worker from Louga said:

<EXT>The hardest part is advising young people on entrepreneurship and training: it is not a very open society to labor, even on the educational level. Not all will go to emigration. Young people love to emigrate too much! It is an area where there are a lot of [ignorant] villagers. Young people go to school with the desire to emigrate in mind. . . . The fight against emigration is the policies that allow young people to succeed here in Senegal. (M. T., Louga, March 2020)</EXT>

In Louga, even the representatives of the Municipal Youth Council affirmed, “It’s very difficult to keep young people here!” (C. C. J., Louga, March 2020). Although migration remains an important model of social success (Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017; Fall 2016), the representation that development actors give reduces its dignity by reproducing the paradigm of sedentary lifestyle and of irregularization of international mobility. We are thus witnessing a tendency to incriminate migration decision-making, as the director of an important development institution indicates:

<EXT>The initiative to go to emigration is mainly due to the lack of economic prospects here. There are also some parents who are accomplices in this, with education for example. There is also the mimicry which is also one of the factors because we see an emigrant who goes to Europe for five years and comes back to build house and drive a nice car. When we are in the same family, the parent can say “Your cousin or your brother has made achievements, so you have to go and try the adventure like him,” and this can create a starting idea. (M. D., Louga, February 2020)</EXT>

From this representation, relatives are described as accomplices, and migration as an

adventure, an exceptional and anomic decision. This vision is all the more surprising in that it is formulated in a context that boasts a strong and consolidated culture of mobility and migration. We do not want to underrate genuine popular anxiety about the dangers and risks of migration, together with the doubts and even scorn concerning the choice to leave, but one detects some effects of years of campaigns to discourage this option. Even in the words of returning migrants who were involved and coopted in interventions aimed to fight migration, the same stigmatizing patterns emanate toward aspirations and inclinations to migrate. The following testimony is that of the president of an association of returning migrants, invited to reflect on the difficulties faced by young fishermen in his area, the Saloum Islands:

<EXT>People have to be encouraged to stay here and to find [work] here! . . . For me, development is being able to meet your needs where you are, being able to help loved ones, working in synergy to be able to move [to] the locality where you come from. . . . The priority is agriculture. The land is the priority, because it gives you back everything you give it. . . . In the years to come, with good organization, if we manage the land and poultry farming, these are the real priority areas for participating in youth employment. (A. N., Fatick, August 2020)</EXT>

In contrast, the viewpoint of young and ordinary people is quite different. Development interventions, instead of being seen as appointments missed due to presumed (individual) inability to integrate with the challenges of the present or the changes underway, are seen as one of the main factors that contribute to increasing inequalities and result from bad governance. Those who have access to the projects and services are described as having “long arms,” that is, they are inserted into the right networks. But in general, and in all three contexts, what characterizes young people in their relationship to development is the extreme difficulty in accessing resources. In Louga, it is mainly about financial resources. In Diaobé,

it is access to land and agricultural means of production, often dispensed by the public companies responsible for agricultural development mentioned above. In the Saloum Islands, in addition to the availability of means such as pirogues and engines, access to the sea and fishery resources is becoming increasingly elusive. Caught in the grip of fisheries agreements between Senegal and the European Union (renewed in November 2020) or other foreign countries, the growing protection of marine areas and mangroves, and the impact of environmental changes, the young fisherman of the archipelago struggle more and more with unequal weapons. In fact, the inaccessibility of resources radically precludes, for almost all of them, the effective participation in personal and collective development.

<FC3>Figure 3.

The difficulty of accessing an employee job cuts across all contexts. For those who have studied, the general devaluation of qualifications is an extremely widespread phenomenon, equal only to the precariousness of proto-working paths, such as underpaid internships and unpaid services. For the others, who make up the majority of the youth population, work remains an inaccessible horizon and economic vulnerability a familiar condition. This does not mean that young people remain stuck or victims of this sense of abjection (Ferguson 2006) and condition of marginality: on the contrary, they continue to invent their daily life by navigating economies and opportunities that produce mobility and social change from below.

<H1>Facing Uncertainty and Nurturing Hope in Migration Decision-Making

The story of D, like that of many others, shows us how young people do not live in a condition of expectation of adulthood (Honwana 2012). Their trajectories are constantly shaped by and in mobility. An interlocutor explains:

<EXT>My goal is to have money, and anywhere I can make money is fine with me! If you see people opting for Europe, it's just that they believe they can have what they want easily. It's only a matter of hope! [My goal is to] leave, have some money, and come and take care of my family and build a house. (A. D., Louga, February 2020)</EXT>

D himself stated: "Success is easier and more accessible through migration. Here one works until exhaustion and is not paid enough."

The decision to migrate is predominantly left to men. A woman told us, "Since I'm married, when I leave, it's my husband who'll make the decision" (A. D., Louga, February 2020). This reveals that marriage remains a fundamental category for the decision to migrate. As promoted by the Family Code and Muslim discourse, it is the husband's job to provide for the household, while money earned by the wife or received through remittances is managed by her (Buggenhagen 2012; Diouf and Leichtman 2009). However, "in the age of neoliberalism, men are often unable to live up to the idealized role of breadwinner, and their failure to provide for their families undermines their status and identity" (Perry 2005, 210). Men's social immobility and vulnerability does not necessarily entail a reversal of gender relations: "the key theoretical point here is not that a crisis of masculinity signals women's wholesale emancipation, but that patriarchy is itself mutable and variable" (Perry 2005, 223).

What emerges clearly from the data is a progressive individualization of the decision-making process to leave or to stay. What characterize the daily life of most young people is a sense of exclusion from development processes and an unequal access to economic and incoming-generating resources. To this is added a growing vulnerability, linked to the

inability to respond to pressures coming from households and kinship groups or more generally to distressing and unfulfilled social expectations (Bal and Willems 2014).

Social expectations—prefigured visions of the self and the future—imply both entitlements and responsibilities. It is therefore precisely what is familiar and known that generates anxiety, suffering, or frustration. Migration offers uncertainty but therefore the possibility of change. Djibril is a firstborn able to marry and take care of his parents and closest relatives. Over the years, he learned a job and opened a small business, which today includes apprentices and partners. Socially and economically, he can be considered satisfied, with his dignity affirmed, yet he still aspires to migrate. As with many other young people, something else seems to be at stake in his version of the future.

The perspectives and practices of cross-border mobility appear more relevant than their regularity or irregularity in determining people's aspirations and choices. They contain an open and partially indeterminate dimension in young people's eyes. The difference between regular and irregular migration is not an emic or operational one: the decision to leave seems situated on the border between subjectivity and subjunctivity (see Whyte 2002). Resorting to the concept of subjunctivity is a way to focus on the intentions, doubts, and hopes of people who look toward a future whose contours are uncertain and opaque, as uncertainty is an inherent dimension in the way people act and live their existences (Whyte 2009). Our interlocutors never thematized as a problem or a concern the uncertainties of migration; on the contrary, they celebrated an illegal journey as a horizon of unexpected possibilities: "*Touki bi mome sante Yallah*" ("We thank God for the clandestine migration"), said a young pirogue captain from the Saloum Islands, who had repeatedly tried to reach Europe by sea before deciding to stay put:

<EXT>When the illegal emigration arrived, there was a big change because before we saw people who until the age of forty were taken

care of by families. Today, you'll see a young man of nineteen who takes care of the whole family and builds his house, et cetera, . . . and all thanks to illegal emigration. . . . To have a visa in Senegal is very expensive; not everyone can have it. This is why we say "Aah!" that illegal migration is a good thing, a very good thing. Anyone who dies there, we'll know that was his grave [destiny] there! (A. S., Dionewar Island, September 2020)</EXT>

What matters is to keep moving, to look for money, to prepare for a better life. The real difficulty and pain, for our interlocuters, come from the immobility, economic vulnerability, and subjugation that characterize their daily life:

<EXT>You know what they say about belief: they say it can lift mountains. I'm not saying that young people who want to leave are unreasonable, but they follow their reason because you can work here in Senegal for three years and not achieve what you want. . . . You don't want to work your whole life and not achieve anything when you see someone going to Europe for three years and coming back to bring their parents to Mecca. It's a belief; it's a sort of achievement! Build a beautiful house and marry a woman! You may have degrees here, but if you don't have a beautiful house, a beautiful car, a beautiful wife, your success is put on hold—which is why young people prefer to emigrate in the hope of having a better life, a better condition of life. (D. D., Louga, February 2020)</EXT>

The decision to migrate, despite or perhaps precisely through uncertainty, raises the possibility of change, of social and "existential mobility" (Hage 2009; Kleist and Thorsen 2017; Papadopoulos 2004). In this sense, for many, uncertainty is more desirable than the

certainty one leaves behind. Uncertainty thus becomes a “ground of social practice and hope,” not only chosen, but embraced (Di Nunzio 2019, 196). It offers prospects of escaping the conditions left behind, but this implies an active attitude, not just the ability to dream or aspire. In this sense, uncertainty and hope become productive when the potential of indeterminacy is sought (Miyazaki 2004), when objectives and existential conjunctures are pursued with the means available, even if they are not enough:

<EXT>My ambition was to engage in illegal migration. . . . I’d started driving a Jakarta [scooter] in 2015, after dropping out of *quatrième* [third year of middle school] because of my family’s lack of funds. . . .

When did you decide to try the migration?

End of 2017. The Jakarta business wasn’t working; I spent everything I earned, so I returned the motorbike to its owner. I was unemployed for three weeks, but I told myself that this situation couldn’t continue. I then went to see my big sister, who gave me a sum of money that I accumulated with what I’d saved. Afterward, I left for Bamako to continue toward Burkina. The money I had was insufficient, and I had to turn back. (D. D., Diaobé, May 2020)</EXT>

This does not mean that people question the logic of marginalization and subjugation that dominate their lives and the contexts to which they belong. The co-optation of returning migrants in development projects demonstrates this. More generally, the desire and the fact that people return to affirm their success reveals an adherence to the dynamics of social reproduction and permanence (Gaibazzi 2015). Nonetheless, the capacity to embrace hope and uncertainty contains an effort to overcome subjugation and the inequalities of the present; it is not just a matter of thinking or imagining that what is not given may be possible in the future, as a form of waiting: embracing hope and uncertainty means challenging the social

practices, rules, and forms of mobility by embracing the possibility of "getting a chance" in the direction of an open-ended future (Di Nunzio 2019, 197–98). Understanding the story of Djibril and Cheikh allows us to give space to notions such as incoherence (Massa 2018), chance (Gladkova and Mazzucato 2017), and the open-endedness of the future (Di Nunzio 2019).

This radically calls into question the possibility of thinking of decision-making processes as linear projects, dominated by clear social logics, such as family or lineage strategies. Today, policies to restrict international and intercontinental mobility have fragmented not only migratory routes on the ground, but also the possibility of making projects and predicting movements, and of building networks and support models like those that once emanated from transnational kinship ties and religious and community solidarities (Diop 2008; Fall 2016). This does not mean that people do not move or reduce their inclination to migrate (Alpes 2014); on the contrary, as in the case of Djibril, the migration maps have probably expanded. Nor does it mean that social logics—such as expectations, models of success, and forms economic responsibility—do not play a central role in pushing young people, especially males, to move out of vulnerability, to "seek for money" (Gaibazzi 2015; Prothman 2017; Schultz 2019). However, it means that these social logics have become more a constraint than a support (Willems 2014) and that the choice to leave and the tools to do so are increasingly entrusted to individuals' personal ability to navigate (Vigh 2009), protean rules, tight networks, and debts.

International migration is still characterized by complex social support models, even if more fragmented. Sometimes people start off by investing entire family capital. According to a notable in Diaobé, "most young migrants rely on family resources emerging from agriculture or cattle and land selling" (A. B. K., Diaobé, May 2020). But when we observe or listen to young people, things seem to be remarkably different. Many interviewees had

accumulated capital through repeated and intensive experiences of mobility, mainly to the capital or other urban centers. In most of their stories, important family investments or specific rights—like male primogeniture, once widespread—did not seem to prevail in migration decision-making. A multitude of precarious and temporary economic activities, among which the driving of Jakarta scooters stands out, recur in retrospective stories:

<EXT>When you were leaving who helped you?

My parents. They were the ones who held my money; as I went along [in the journey,] they’d send me an amount according to my needs.

But where did you collect the money?

In the Diaobé market. I was unloading or loading smoked fish; I was also selling it. It also came from the sale of products from our rice and peanut fields. The money I’d earned was entrusted to my mother, who was in charge of sending me to finance the various stages of my trip. (A. D., Diaobé, April 2020)</EXT>

In this testimony, attempts to gain enough capital to leave utilize income from work and family resources, mainly related to agriculture. These forms of debt are not new, but they continue to blur the notion of “voluntary or autonomous choice” in migration decision-making (O’Connell Davidson 2013, 177). Mechanisms of exchange and dependency thus intertwine with increasingly individual efforts and choices in dealing with movements and displacements, possibilities and uncertainties, and moral economies and lived im/mobilities. An increasingly individualized profile of migratory paths emerges, entrusting the ability to navigate and embrace hope and uncertainty as fundamental elements in making a decision to move or stay.

<H1>Conclusion

Our young interlocutors are often in a condition of marginality deriving from the inequalities produced and reproduced by development policies and the obstacles and restrictions produced by mobility regimes. Their economic and social vulnerabilities are amplified by social expectations and power relationships within households and kinship systems. Despite this position of subjugation, they continue to struggle to produce personhood, but the only means they have at their disposal is the possibility of navigating thin networks of contacts, looking for narrow roads and rides, moving to the edge of an ever-changing legality, accumulating debt in hope of redeeming themselves, and embracing hope and uncertainty in search of a future.

Hope and uncertainty are therefore to be understood as deeply pragmatic and ethical dimensions of experience, not as an oneiric variable of aspirations. Hope consists first in an awareness of the factors and forces external to the subjects, of the limits to the capacity for action (Crapanzano 2004). Consequently, it becomes a way to reorient and readjust one's actions in the face of the unpredictability of external and uncontrollable conditions; in this sense, hope is not just a principle (Bloch 1976), but a method of life (Miyazaki 2004), which expresses the limits of action while offering ways to overcome them. Hope, joined with uncertainty, appears to be an extremely useful concept for thinking about the increasingly individualized process of migration decision-making.

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<REF>NOTES

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[2] This article presents results of the project MIGCHOICE, Testing the Impact of Interventions on Migration Decision-Making in West Africa (University of Birmingham). The project involved the authors for one year in ethnographic research aimed at investigating the impact of development policies and interventions on the process of migration decision-making in five contexts: Louga, Diaobé, Médina Gounass (Guédiawaye), Lamy (Thiès), and the islands of the Saloum river delta archipelago. In these contexts, together with intermittent participant-observation of everyday life among youth and development practitioners, around 150 in-depth interviews were collected, eighty with young people, forty with development actors and local authorities, twenty with notables, and thirty with members of associations, including returning migrant associations.

[3] We borrow from Jean-François Bayart the extremely useful notion of *terroirs historiques* for thinking about the local dynamics of development (1989, 317–18). It defines that set of relationships, inscribed in a specific time-space, that shape local economic, sociopolitical, geographical, and historical configurations.

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