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Transit migration: a piece of the complex mobility puzzle. The case of Senegalese migration.

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims at analyzing transit migration, conceived as the temporary stay in one or more countries, with the objective of reaching a further destination. Transit migration will be in particular studied as part of broader mobility strategies, in a perspective of “continuous migration”, looking at how these movements are embedded in overall migration trajectories. Where do transits take place? From which countries do they originate and where do they lead to? Which position and role do they assume in the overall migration trajectories? These questions will be addressed and explored in this paper.

In the context of increasing complexity and fluidity of flows and routes of African migration to Europe, *step-by-step* mobility has progressively developed as an emerging strategy, with transit migration assuming an increasingly prominent role in migration strategies.

Although migration from and via Africa to the EU has received considerable attention (and is the subject of strong political concern), there is still a lack of *comprehensive* insight into geographical mobility systems and the complex interrelations between different stages of migration trajectories. Such an integrated approach is a precondition for the understanding of transit migration and of its role within the broader migrants’ mobility patterns.

Thanks to their retrospective nature, new data from the MAFE project provide new quantitative evidence on the routes used by Senegalese all along their life course, and, hence, allow to retrace the complete biographical trajectories of migrants through their different steps, including transit migration (Web site of the research project: www.mafeproject.com).

Descriptive and sequence analysis is used in order to provide insight into spatial and chronological outcomes of whole migration trajectories of Senegalese migrants (with a focus on four surveyed countries). The structure of migration patterns is studied through a step-wise longitudinal approach, in order to define how transits are embedded in broader migration trajectories.

The main findings of the analysis indicate that transit: (1) can pertain to short as well as long migration episodes aiming at pursuing the migration to other countries (2) occur often at the beginning of migration careers, but also at later stages and can be re-iterated events (3) are movements aimed at reaching Europe, but at the same time can be developed and oriented within the African space as well as within the European one. The paper shows how transit can be a mobility strategy adopted by migrants at different moments and geographical contexts of their migration career, assuming different characteristics and roles all along the life-course.

Keywords: *transit migration; step-wise migration; life-course approach; sequence analysis; mobility patterns*

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1. The theoretical background

Migration theories, which guided prior research, have been predominantly based on static dichotomous categorizations. In particular most research has been guided by assumptions conceiving migration primarily as: 1) a one-off move from a departure country “A” to a destination country “B”; 2) directed to Europe (revealing a strong Eurocentric bias); 3) entailing a permanent settlement; 4) and with little or no spontaneous return from Europe to origin countries. According to this logic, previous research concentrated almost exclusively on specific phases of the migration process (settlement and integration in destination countries; temporary returns and circulation between sending and receiving countries; permanent return in origin countries) or on their effect on sending and receiving countries.

In particular migration as a mobility process has been understudied (Schapendonk, 2010a): the dynamics of travel from the origins to the destination countries, transit to the intermediate one, mobility and circulation among different origin and destination countries, return and re-settlement in the places of departure remain almost unknown, weakly documented and until now relatively under-researched in the academic field (King, 2000; Zanfrini, 2004; Robin et al., 2000).

Furthermore, available data on migration are few, weakly comparable and fail to capture the longitudinal character of migration. In particular, one of the strongest limits in the study of mobility (and its influence on the development of policies), lies in the fact that both statistical and analytical conceptual frameworks tend to privilege analyses of separate segments of individuals’ migratory paths.

In this context, “methodological nationalism” still seems to dominate as “an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states (Schiller, 2009: 4). This approach is even more inadequate as it is applied to a social field, “cosmopolite” by definition (Beck, 2003), as the one of international migration. As already noted by a number of authors, the “permanent settlement migration paradigm” still defines our data collection systems (Agunias, 2006). Moreover, traditional understandings of migration and migrants have focused on predominantly dichotomous categorisations which proved to be inadequate to address the multiple, shifting nature of migration² (Collyer, de Haas, forthcoming).

As a consequence, there is a lack of insight into geographical mobility systems and logics and into the complex interrelations between different stages of the migratory trajectories. We need an integrated, comprehensive approach to understand all the migratory routes: from the home country, through the various stages, including transit migrations. The knowledge of the geographical and longitudinal structure of mobility is in fact preliminary to the understanding of migration processes and driving forces.

² According to the authors, the ways of categorising migration have been mainly based until now on time/space approach (permanent v. temporary; Internal v. International); location/direction (Immigration v. emigration; origin v. destination; ‘home’ v. ‘host’); causes (labour, student, retirement, family; forced v. voluntary) and state perspectives (legal v. illegal; regular v. irregular).

The concept of transit migration, first entered the public discourse and the scientific attention during the 1990s, as pushed onto the agenda by various international organizations, think tanks and European institutions (Düvell, 2006), in relation to the growing intensification of flows and diversification of migrations paths towards Europe. The newly emerging “geography of migration” was identified in particular with the process of internationalization and externalization of EU migration policies, and with the related increasing legal restrictions on migration and intensified border controls (Collyer, Düvell, de Haas, forthcoming; Boswell, 2003). The notion of transit migration was thus born as a blurred, politicized (implying concern for the illegal entry of undocumented masses of people) and Eurocentric (assuming that all the migrants settled at the “fringes” of Europe were necessarily oriented to Europe) label (Düvell, 2006).

Since then, although a flourishing of empirical and theoretical literature has contributed to a deeper knowledge of the phenomenon, yet, as Düvell highlighted (2008), there is no single and commonly agreed category or definition for “transit migration” neither in international policy and international law, nor in sociological and anthropological studies. Instead, there are many. Or like some authors state (de Haas and Collyer, forthcoming; Cassarino, Fargues, 2006) there is ultimately an absence of fixed and clear definition of the concept, rather based on (usually implicit) assumptions.

Research on the topic is thus obstructed by significant definition and measurement constraints. Transit migration is a process rather than a migration status, a phase that cuts across various migrant categories, irregular as well as regular migrants, voluntary as well as forced migrants, workers as well as students, etc. (Cassarino and Fargues, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2009). Furthermore transits can take place in very different conditions, with the most disparate reasons and intentions, leading to multiple (often unpredictable) outcomes. Migrants’ projects and aspirations are often changeable and in-progress, indicating that migration is often not a linear process. Initial plans can be strongly influenced, changed and re-defined at different phases all along the trajectory (Schapendonk 2010a; 2010b; 2009).

The difficulty of analytically framing the concept of transit is added up to the fact that transiting migrants are not or only partially registered in transit countries, due to their mobility and the (often misconceived) temporary and limited-in-time nature of their stay in those countries. Available data on migrants’ interceptions at borders (notably the Frontex database) are poor, not reliable, and potentially subject to manipulation for political purposes. Furthermore they don’t tell us much about the real experiences of migrants. As a consequence, studies on transit migration rarely rely on quantitative research (Collyer, Düvell, de Haas, forthcoming).

The notion of ‘temporariness’ embodied within the concept of transit is also conceptually very difficult to define: how long, or short, transit is supposed to last in order to be interpreted as transit migration, and after what length of stay does ‘transit’ turn into the beginning of a settlement process? Transits may in fact last for considerable periods of time, with waiting periods varying from weeks to several months and, in some cases, years.

Furthermore, little distinction is made between those in need of international protection (refugees, minors) and other (economic) migrants.

All these elements indicate how transit is an extremely fluid concept, and therefore a tricky sociological object, which is difficult to define, operationalize, and capture empirically, and which is subject to several biases influenced by highly politicized discourse. Notwithstanding, as a result of this complexity, the transit phenomenon needs to be further problematized and studied, as it is a relevant emerging phenomenon in a rapidly changing international scenario.

Although prior work has not agreed on a single, shared, valid definition of transit migration, the enquire on transit migration has had the non negligible merit of questioning the more general issue of migrants' mobility and identifying its complexity, by contributing to a more comprehensive study of human mobility in a perspective of "continuous migration", the traditional static conception of migration as a linear, univocal, unidirectional movement from an origin A to a destination B, is challenged.

Furthermore the nature of transit migration, as suggested by Collyer and de Haas (forthcoming) opened up productive discussion of broader conceptual issues such as inherent problems involved in conventional policy categories of "types" of migration, the growing significance of migration policy in shaping migration outcomes and migrant categories and also the increasingly influential ways in which policy categories affect the ways in which migration is discussed, studied and understood.

2. Questioning the transit phenomenon in the Afro-European migration

While having general value, a more comprehensive approach to migration mobility is particularly useful in the study of migrations in the African context. Here the diversification of migrants' profiles, migratory destinations and the routes deployed to reach them, rather than an increase in volume (as public opinion and the media tend to stress), have probably been the most significant changes that occurred over the last decades (Guilmoto, Sandron 2003).

In this latter period, the process of securitization and communitarization of the asylum and immigration policies in Europe has contributed to the process of diversification of migratory trajectories. In turn, this has led to a internationalization of migration policies, with relevant consequences in terms of externalization of controls to neighbouring African countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements on border control and readmission. It is increasingly shared among migration analysts that increasing phenomenon of transit migration is linked to the progressive closure of international borders, with the tightening of the entry procedures and the enforcing of the control measures.

The emerging geo-political framework appears very complex: "The habitual distinction between emigration and immigration countries becomes blurred in the face of increasingly complex combinations" (Bredeloup, Pliez, 2005) and the "migration Great Game" (Pastore, 2008) is enlarging from South Mediterranean neighboring countries to the entire African space, transforming

“emigration countries” (such as Senegal, Niger, etc.) into new transit areas for sub-Saharan countries (Fall, 2010; de Haas, 2006).

In this panorama of increasing complexity and fluidity of migration flows and routes towards Europe, *step-by-step migrations* (with a consequent fragmentation of the journey) develop progressively as an emerging migration strategy (Bredeloup, Pliez, 2005) and transit migration (conceived as the temporary stay in one or more countries, with the objective of reaching a further destination) assume an increasing role in the strategies adopted by migrants.

Migration flows from and via Africa to the EU have received considerable attention by scholars, particularly over the last few years. Although several studies have retraced migratory routes mainly for irregular migration directed to Europe, they omit to account for the routes of documented migrants. Furthermore those studies mostly concentrated on the routes employed *on their way to* Europe (van Moppes, 2006; de Haas, 2006; Nyberg Sørensen, 2006), or on some of their segments (Brachet, 2009). Other studies, finally, looked at transit hubs, where significant concentrations of migrants, stuck at the borders of the Southern Mediterranean countries, are waiting to carry on their way to Europe (Pian, 2005; Choplin Lombard, 2009; Ba, Choplin, 2006; Drodz, Pliez, 2006; Boubakri, Mazzella, 2006; among others). However, they notably fail to explore the onward movements once migrants have arrived in Europe or to follow circulations and permanent returns to origin countries.

Furthermore some assumptions are still shared and reproduced, according to whom transit would be mainly associated with:

- 1) a *migratory preliminary phase*, positioned at the beginning of the migration career
- 2) a phenomenon which remains confined in the *African space*, after many transfers and vicissitudes through different countries
- 3) moves necessarily *aimed at entry in Europe*.

3. Research objectives, data and methods

The emerging picture is very complex and needs to be inquired into its full complexity, through a comprehensive and critical approach. To meet these standards, transit migration will be analyzed in this paper as part of broader mobility strategies, and in doing so, some of the assumptions shared and reproduced in public and common scientific discourse will be questioned.

For this purpose migrant trajectories will be looked as composed of one or more episodes (change of countries) and one of more status (periods of residence in different countries) and transits will be highlighted as segments within those trajectories, and will be explored in their characteristics (through descriptive and sequence analysis) and in their role within the whole migration project, according to a life-course approach. Where do transits take place? From which countries do they generate and

where do they lead to? Which position do they assume in broader migration trajectories? These questions will be addressed and explored in this paper.

In this analytical framework, transit migration will be conceived and analysed as a stage of the migration process, and in particular as a temporary stay in a country with the intention to reach further destination(s) (at par. 4 a more detailed definition and empirical operationalisation of transit will be provided).

The study draws on quantitative data issued from the “MAFE Senegal” project³. “MAFE Senegal” (Migration between Africa and Europe) is an international research project on migration between Africa and Europe, and in particular between Senegal and Italy, France, Spain. The research yielded a new data set on Afro-European migration between 2007 and 2008, through comparative surveys in both sending (Senegal) and receiving countries (France, Italy, Spain), and consisted in an household survey held in the region of Dakar and a biographic survey undertaken in Senegal, Italy, France and Spain.

The sampling scheme adopted in the research consisted of:

- For the household survey, a first phase of multi-stage sampling in the Dakar region (selection of primary sampling units -PSU's- from the Senegalese population census data; selection of households in each selected PSU; selection of individuals within the household).

- For the individual biographic survey, a second phase of sampling in Europe consisted in interviewing eligible⁴ migrants whose contact had been provided by the households surveyed in Senegal. This first sample was complemented with other samples obtained through two main techniques: 1) quota method, combining various recruitment channels: migrants' associations, public places, and snowballing techniques; 2) probability sampling method in Spain, which used the Municipal Population Register (Padrón) as a sampling frame to draw a random sample of people born in Senegal and living in Spain at the time of the survey. This register presents the unique advantage of including undocumented as well as documented migrants (Beauchemin, González-Ferrer, 2009: 9).

The sample of respondents is composed of current migrants in Europe (Spain, France, Italy); return migrants in Senegal; non migrants in Senegal (see tab. 1). Data used in this paper are referred to the individual sample of current migrants interviewed in Europe (601) added up to 208 return migrants interviewed in Senegal.

³ Results presented in this paper have been obtained using the MAFE-Senegal survey. The Senegalese part of the Migration between Africa and Europe (MAFE) project is coordinated by INED (C. Beauchemin), in association with the the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (P. Sakho). The project also involves the Pompeu Fabra university (P. Baizan), the Centro Nacional de Investigacion Cientificas (A. Gonzalez-Ferrer), and FIERI (Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione; E. Castagnone). The survey was conducted with the financial support of INED, the Agence Nationale de la Recherche, the Ile de France Region, the FSP programme entitled 'International Migrations, territorial reorganizations and development of the countries of the South'. The Italian research activities were co-financed by the Compagnia di San Paolo of Turin.

⁴ Interviewees had to be individuals: (a) born in Senegal, (b) with Senegalese nationality at some point in his/her life, (c) who had migrated to Europe for the first time at age 18 or older and, (d) aged between 25 and 70 at the time of the survey. In all countries, the samples were stratified by sex (half men and half women) and age (with each sex, half aged 25-40 and the other half aged 41-70). Specific regions within each destination country were also selected, instead of carrying out the surveys over their whole territory (Beauchemin, González-Ferrer, 2009: 8).

Tab. 1: Sample of the research

	Spain	France	Italy	Senegal	Total
Current migrants	200	200	201	0	601
Returnees	0	0	0	208	208
Non migrants	0	0	0	859	859
Total	200	200	201	1,067	1,668

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

The population of surveyed migrants (current + returnees) amount to 809 individuals, among which 58% are men and 42% women. Women were over-represented in European samples, with the objective of including an equal share of males and females, in order to allow gender analyses⁵.

The biographical nature of data allows to look retrospectively at individuals' migration experience and to analyse extended periods of migration experience. Thanks to their retrospective nature, the MAFE data allow to generate unique comprehensive and longitudinal quantitative evidence on the routes used by Senegalese and other African migrants all along their life course, allowing to retrace the whole migration trajectory of individuals through their different steps. This includes itineraries within Africa to reach the EU; their mobility within the EU; and temporary and permanent return to Senegal.

Despite the unique nature of the MAFE data and the valuable information they provide, it should be however underlined that MAFE project was not specifically designed to study transit migration: in-detail qualitative information (essential for a deep comprehension of the phenomenon, centered on the perspective of migrants themselves) on this particular type of migration are consequently limited or incomplete.

Furthermore, some main bias derive from the sampling frame in the MAFE research. In particular data mainly giving account for a particular type of migration: directed to the three selected European destinations, failing to acknowledge other increasingly important destinations, as the USA, or other Europe countries; and "successful", i.e. migrants captured in the survey are the ones who managed to reach Europe, excluding those who were on their way to Europe, without reaching it as final destination. Moreover, for the fact of having sampled migrants already settled in Europe, mainly individuals with Europe-oriented projects were selected.

While, finally, intra-continental movements (both in West Africa and in North Africa) appear as a crucial dimension of mobility from Senegal (cfr. chapter 2), the MAFE survey could only randomly give account of it, mainly through the sample of returnees interviewed in Senegal who previously broadly circulated in the African space. To have a full picture of this second type of migration, the research should have ideally sampled migrants also in African destinations. Nevertheless, as we will see in next chapters, intra-continental migration inevitably emerges as an essential part of the Senegalese mobility scenario.

⁵ Senegalese women in 2008 were : 16% in Spain; 13% in Italy; 46% in France.

4. Transit migrations in the MAFE sample: definition and operationalization of the variable

As already mentioned, the MAFE questionnaire captures two types of migration: 1) migrations of more than a year and 2) migrations of less than a year. The second, short-term, group of movements, is composed in the survey by: 2a) transits (temporary migrations with the intention of reaching one or more countries, or 2b) "failed" migrations (i.e. of those who wanted to settle in that country but then had to leave within a year upon their arrival).

In the current analysis the transit variable was in particular built up adding the modalities of three variables in the questionnaire⁶:

I) migration from the group 2a: short stays (less than a year) outside Senegal explicitly defined as "transits" (answer 3 to question q606)

and migration lasting more than a year obtained from the group 1, crossing and adding up different variables:

II) Answer 3 to question q607: when arrived in the country of stay, the respondent declared he/she "had in mind to go elsewhere, it was therefore a transit country".

III) Answer to open question q605 ("reason for choosing the country of stay, rather to another country") as a transitory destination with the aim of following in successive destination(s).

Transit migration in this work is thus defined as:

1) *voluntary* (\neq forced): in the sampled population almost no asylum seekers and no refugees were surveyed. Nonetheless rather than applying dichotomous classifications such as between forced and voluntary migration, as suggested by de Haas (2009: 53) it would be more appropriate to conceive migrants in a continuum running from low to high constraints under which migration occurs. As an example, several surveyed women declared they had not migrated by their own will, but upon family obligations, typically as a result of reunification with their husbands or other close relatives. This does not necessarily mean that they were strictly forced to migrate, but such cases should remind us how the decision to migrate and the conditions in which migration occur deal with multiple structural [but also individual and familiar] constraints, although to highly varying degrees (*ibidem*).

2) both *documented* or *non documented* movement: the MAFE project surveyed both documented and undocumented migrants and collected information on the legal status of respondents at any moment of the life course. Legal conditions of migrants are in fact changeable in time and irregular conditions can occur at different moments: "most irregular migrants enter destination countries legally, but subsequently overstay their visas, or engage in prohibited work, through which their status becomes irregular. The other way around, migrants entering or residing in a country illegally can acquire legal residency through obtaining work, marriage or regularization. In the case of

⁶ See questionnaire on project website: www.mafeproject.com

overland migration from West Africa, migrants cross many countries, some of which do allow their entry, some of which not, so that a migrant moves in and out of formal regularity and irregularity” (de Haas, 2007: 4).

3) *self-defined*: the transit migrations were explicitly declared as such (component I of the variable, see above) or defined as transitory and provisional (rather than permanent) steps aimed at reaching further destinations (answering a set II and III of questions in the questionnaire), by migrants themselves, and labelled in the study as “transits”. As a result both short and long term transits will be taken in account.

4) as *migration aimed at reaching further - both European and non-European - destination countries*.

Both the “self-definition” and the “intention” items in (transit) migration raise some relevant methodological concerns.

While the individual biographical narratives underline the “role of the teller in constructing her/his own life narrative, through a process of selection, ordering and giving meaning to particular events and stories” (Ni Laoire, 2008: 198 in Kou, Bailey and van Wissen 2009), *self-definition* seems to be a crucial element in the identification of transit. This phenomenon is in fact intimately connected to subjective *intention* (albeit submitted to various constraints at different degrees) to move to further aimed destinations (associated with the temporary character of settlement in intermediate transit countries).

Nonetheless it is only *a posteriori* that transit can be defined as such, as a situation that “may or may not develop into further migration” (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008: 5). Therefore the application of transit definition to a certain migration phenomenon would probably vary according to when the question is asked and would change over time, through the filter of the progressive experienced migration outcomes. As Van Liempt (2007) suggests, ideally the same migrants should be interviewed at different moments along their migration process, in order to be able to capture the changing dynamics of trajectories and to confront the intentions and perceptions of countries prior to moving on, with the final outcomes of these migration processes and how they eventually re-qualify and re-define their experience.

As also Brachet (2008: 2) highlights, it is primarily the intention and the aware project of migrants to continue and to move to further stages, that gives meaning to the concept of transit, even in a phase of prolonged waiting or settlement.

However, these methodological and empirical caveats should not discourage scholarly inquiry into the phenomenon, but they should rather stimulate a questioning of the assumptions that underlie common discourse on transits and raise a critical reflection on the definition and methodological choices.

5. Space and time: the dynamic coordinates of transits

The first crucial point is how many migrants did transit all along the migratory “career”. According to the MAFE data, out of the 809 (actual and return) migrants, 94 accomplished transit movements: more than a migrant over ten (11.6%) experienced at least one transit migration, and over 1521 migrations undertaken by the whole sample, 158 were transit migration episodes (10.4%).

As already stated, transit migration will be studied within the global individual trajectories. That implies that all the steps since first migration till the survey time will be taken into account in order to study transits, as pieces of the complex mobility puzzle. For this purpose trajectories will be broken into pieces, i.e. migration “episodes”, in order to analyze their characteristics (length, direction, legal status, etc.) and their different composition.

Through descriptive and sequence analysis, a step-wise approach will be applied in order to visualize how transits are embedded in the broader trajectories. Some sequence analysis will provide an analysis of the *structure* of migrations, reducing different migration events in homogeneous units (one migration step=one unit in the sequence). These units represent migratory events longer or shorter than a year and their sequencing in time jointly constitute migratory routes.

In the graphs below (1-4 and 5-8), representing the complete migratory trajectories of Senegalese migrants captured by the four sub-samples (France, Spain, Italy, Senegal), each segment of the sequences will therefore have the same length (with each line representing an individual) and the aggregate length of each sequence will be determined by the total number of the migration spells (including returns to Senegal) for each interviewee, of rather than by the total length of the migration.

The different composition (chronological sequencing of units), geographical extent (countries where they occurred), and nature (in this case either *transit* or *all other* migrations) of migration episodes will shape mobility trajectories.

The order of the sequence clustering within each chart is determined by the similarity of the trajectories starting from the first episode of the sequence. This is why the transits, which are mainly concentrated at the beginning of migration career are displayed in the upper side of the chart.

In particular the first set of graphs (Graphs 1-4) helps in visualizing at a glance some key information on transits: a) transit areas b) their position in the whole migration trajectories c) the number of transits by migrant. These information will be looked at in depth and integrated through some detailed tables.

If we take as an example the first line at the top of the graph. 1 (corresponding to the whole trajectory of an individual), we can see that this migrant had as a first migration in his life a transit in France, that then led to a further migration, that we know occurred in Spain, as the last (ongoing) episode at the moment of the survey occurred when he was sampled for the interview. We find a

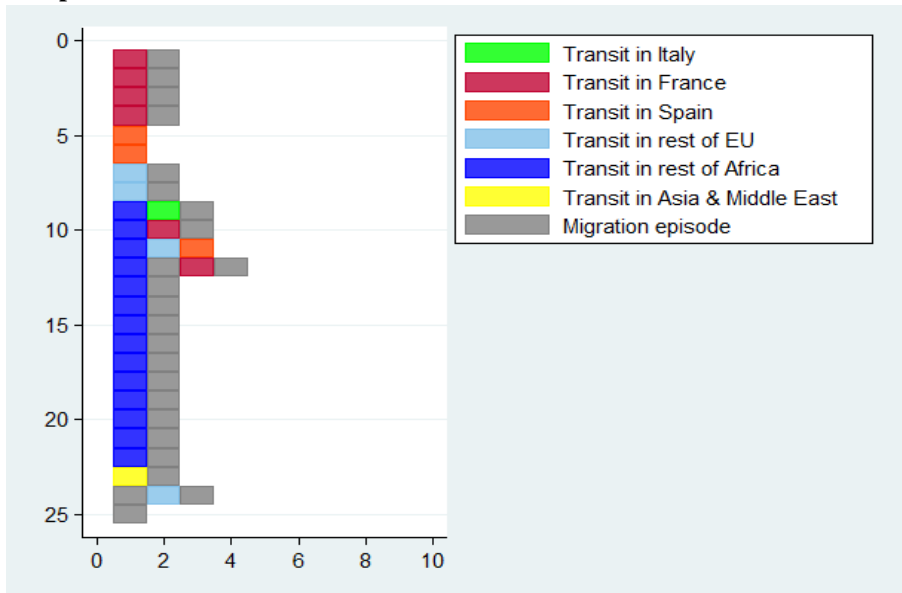
similar pattern for the graph. 2, where the first step was a transit in Italy, then leading to France, where the migrant was finally interviewed.

The first line of the graph. 3 shows an interesting case, where the only episode is a transit in the current country of residence: Italy. It means that this migrant in 2008 (the MAFE survey year) was transiting in Italy as a first migratory step, planning to continue in a further country.

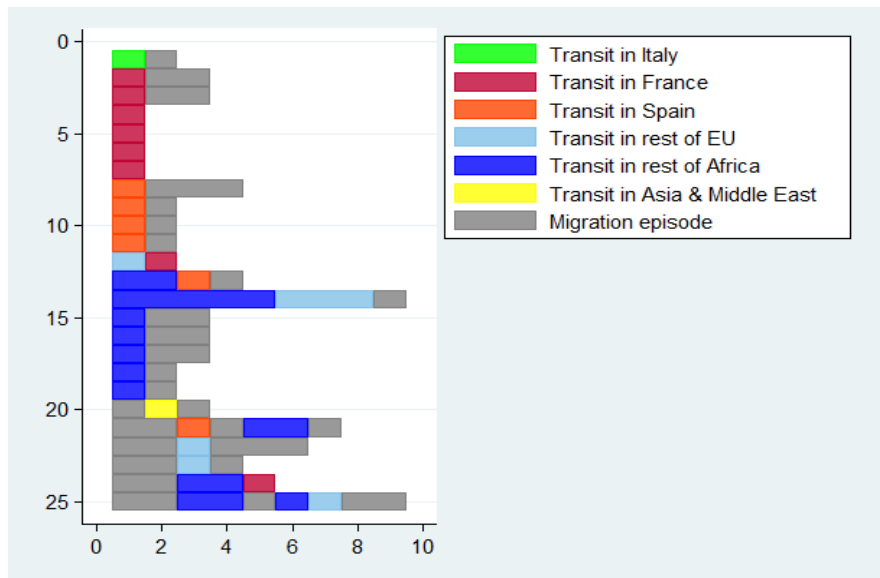
Finally, the first line of the graph. 4 tell us that this migrant undertook a first transit in Italy; then had two further migration episodes in two different countries (corresponding to two grey segments in the sequence); then experienced a further transit in a European country other than Italy, France or Spain; finally he undertook two more migration steps, among which, we are aware, the last one is a (permanent) return to Senegal.

SEQUENCES OF MIGRATION EPISODES (>and< 1YEAR) and TRANSITS (>and< 1YEAR) by sample: TRANSIT AREAS

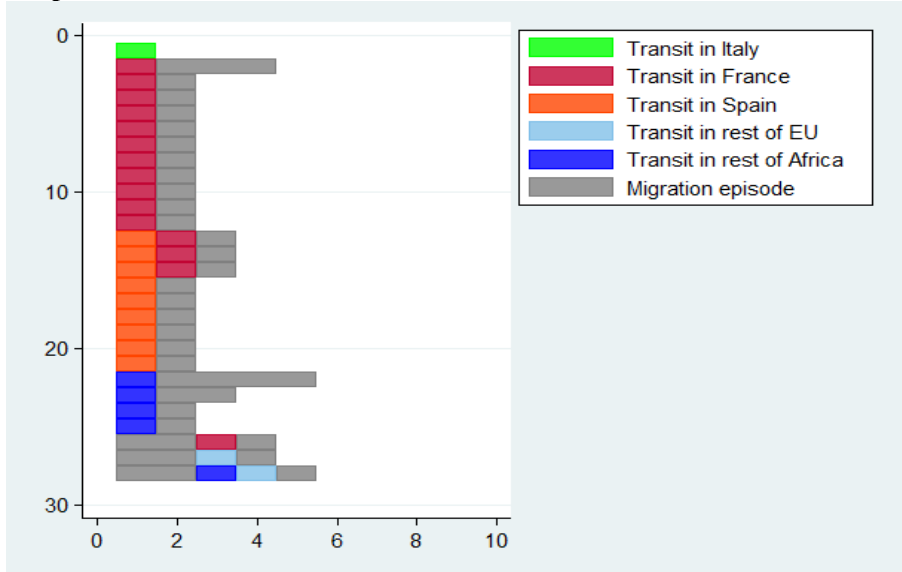
Graph 1 SPANISH SAMPLE



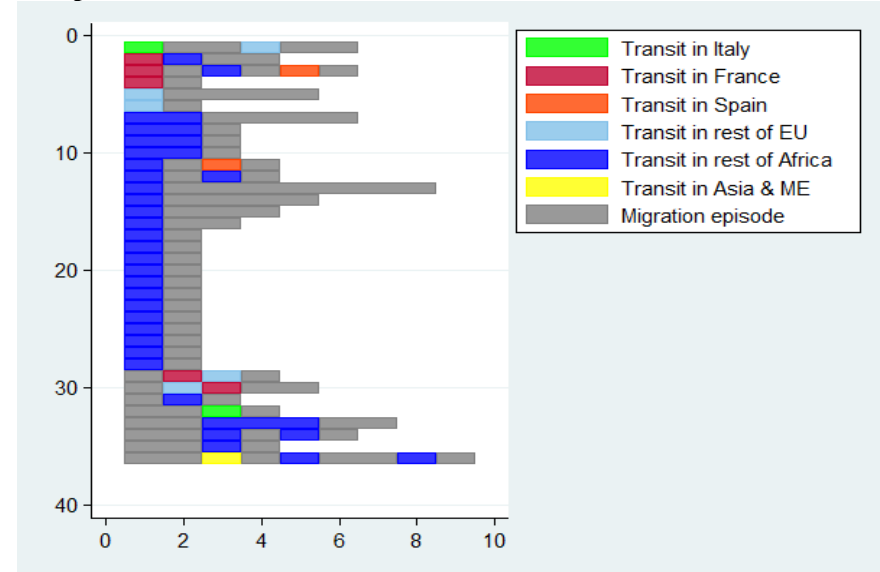
Graph 2 FRENCH SAMPLE



Graph 3 ITALIAN SAMPLE



Graph 4 SENEGALESE SAMPLE



Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

The areas in which transit take place are also presented in the next table (tab. 2). Here we can observe the total number of transits spent in each area and their distribution according to their length. The information on duration is here complemented, as in the previous sequences, as already mentioned, it was omitted for visualization reasons.

We can thus see that while over 60% of transits last less than a year, 40% of transits lasted for from more than a year to many years. This figure shows that for a number of individuals, transit movement often becomes a semi-permanent condition: a state of “permanent transit” produced by a combination of institutional constraints and migrant aspirations. Yet, despite the prolonged duration, they can still be considered as provisional settlement, oriented to onward migration.

Overall, Africa is the transit space *par excellence*. The data clearly show that for the sampled migrants, half of the transits took place in this space, with a strong predominance of West African (25.9%) and North African countries (20.3%) over Central African countries (3.2%)⁷. In both Western and Northern Africa migrants transited for short as well as for extended periods.

Italy, France and Spain represent 37.3% of the transit areas. Certainly, as already mentioned, these figures are over-represented, due to a selection bias (respondents were sampled in these countries of destination). However they offer some highlights on relevant differences *among* the three countries: Italy does not emerge as a transit country (only 3.2% take place in this country), but rather as a stable “final” destination. Spain is reached as a destination but also as a transit country (13.3% of total transits). Here transits tend to last a few months, but in some cases they may extend to several years. This applies even to a greater extent to France, where 21.5% of detected transits were spent, among which about a third extended to one or more years.

A possible explanation for the higher incidence of transit in France is the possibility of entering France with provisional visas, and the presence of a larger support network of already settled friends and relatives. It has already been mentioned that since the end of the 1980s Senegalese migrations re-oriented to new destinations, particularly to Italy. From a certain time onwards, therefore, the arrivals in France were partly aimed at moving to other countries, mainly to Italy and Spain, as shown below in table 2.

According To Tall (2008), in fact, from 1974 onwards several Senegalese in France fell into an irregular situation (as overstayers) as a consequence of French border closure, resulting by the stop to recruitment of foreign manpower. The year 1985 marks a new date for further tightening of conditions of entry and residence in the country, with the introduction of entry visas for several African countries, and with the hardening of the conditions for obtaining such documents. France has become a gateway to Italy, especially since the mid 1990s, both through undocumented entries, thanks to the intermediation of "smugglers" between Nice and San Remo around the border post of

⁷ In particular :

- Western Africa: Mauritania (12/40), Mali (7/40), Ivory Coast (5/40), Guinea Bissau (4/40), Gambia (4/40), Guinea (2/40), Niger (2/40), Nigeria (1/6940), Liberia (1/40), Burkina (2/69), Benin (1/69)
- Northern Africa: Morocco (23/33), Tunisia (4/33), Algeria (4/33), Libya (2/33);
- Central Africa: Cameroun (3/6), Equatorial Guinea (1/6), Centre African Republic (1/6), Gabon (1/6).

Ventimiglia, and by obtaining short-stay visas for the latter country. Spain on the other side has in recent years played an important role as a gateway to Europe, both for documented and non-documented migrants. Both countries correspondingly in this period started adopting admission policies for foreign workers, through ex post amnesties and regularizations, which had as an effect to attract large amount of migrants.

Tab. 2: Areas of transit episodes by length of transit episodes

	< 1 year	1 year	2-5 years	6-10 years	>10 years	Total	%	
Spain	15	1	1	2	1	20	12.7	
France	22	4	4	1	3	34	34.0	
Italy	2	2	1	0	0	5	3.2	
West. EU	9	0	1	0	0	10	6.3	
South. EU	4	1	1	0	0	6	3.8	11.4
East. EU	2	0	0	0	0	2	1.3	
West. Africa	20	7	10	4	0	41	25.9	49.4
North. Africa	20	8	4	0	0	32	20.3	
Centr. Africa	2	1	2	0	0	5	3.2	
Asia & ME	1	2	0	0	0	3	1.9	
Total	97	26	24	7	4	158	100	
%	61.4	16.5	15.2	4.4	2.5	100		

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

As already noted in the sequences, transits are mainly located in the first part of the migration career (59.5%). Nevertheless table 3 substantiates the analysis depicted in the graphs 1-4, by showing that over 40% of the transits occur even after the first migration and develop between the second and the eight stage. They are the first step out from Senegal, but also a strategy adopted in the advanced course of migration, i.e. after having experienced long-term migrations (of several years) in other countries.

Tab 3: Position of transit in the migration sequence (trajectory)

	a.n.	%
1	94	59.5
2	22	13.9
3	21	13.3
4	7	4.4
5	7	4.4
6	3	1.9
7	3	1.9
8	1	0.6
Total	158	100

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

Some of them are also re-iterated transit migration: different consecutive transits are undertaken, as shown in table 4. In particular among the Senegalese sample (returnees) and the French sample, more than half of all migrants transited more than once or in more than one country (respectively 31/43 and 23/42 migrants). Those residing in Italy and Spain at the survey time had transited comparatively less frequently and in a lower number: individuals gained more direct entry into the two countries, i.e. by undertaking fewer steps. It should anyway taken in account that both Senegalese and French migration are more established, thus migrants from these two groups had longer periods of migration, and higher probability of undertaking a higher number of transits.

Tab. 4: Number of transit episodes per migrant, by sample

N. of transits	Spanish s.	French s.	Italian s.	Senegalese s.	Total	%
1	19	19	24	22	84	53.2
2	8	2	8	22	40	25.3
3	0	9	0	9	18	11.4
4	4	4	0	0	8	5.1
8	0	8	0	0	8	5.1
Total	31	42	32	53	158	100

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

6. Transit embeddedness: how do transits fit into the whole migration process? Before and after transits.

But how do transit migrations fit into the whole migration process? From which countries do they generate and where do they lead to? This additional information can tell us much about the role and the outcome of transits in migrant strategies.

According to the available data presented in table 5 and in the graphs 9-12, transit migrations stem mainly from Senegal (70.9%) or from other African countries (18.4%): they are mainly the first step out of Senegal, or those immediately following mostly undertaken in West African or, to a lesser extent, in North African countries. However, they generate (albeit to a lesser extent), even from France (3.8%), Spain (1.9%), or other European countries (5.1%) at an advanced level in the career of migration.

Tab. 5: Areas before transits by area of transit

DEPART AREAS		TRANSIT AREAS							
		Italy	France	Spain	rest EU	rest Africa	Asia & ME	Total	%
	France	1	0	0	1	3	1	6	3.8
	Spain	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	1.9
	Italy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
	Senegal	3	25	17	10	55	2	112	70.9
Rest of EU	West. EU	0	2	0	1	1	0	4	2.5
	North. EU	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.6
	South. EU	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1.3
	East. EU	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.6
Rest of Africa	West. Africa	0	1	1	1	15	0	18	11.4
	North. Africa	1	1	1	2	5	0	10	6.3
	Centr. Africa	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	1.9
	Asia & ME	1	0	1	3	3	0	8	5.1
	Total	5	34	20	18	78	3	158	100

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

Nevertheless, although departures from European countries are less frequent than from Senegal or other African countries, it is a striking finding that a proportion of transit migrations occurs after entry in the European space, which fundamentally questions common assumptions in the literature.

The transits occurring in the European space can be read as migrations deliberately and instrumentally aimed at the pursuit of further destinations, as we have assumed for a part of transits occurring in France towards Southern Europe since the 1990s.

They can be further interpreted as re-orientation mobility aimed at recomposing the trajectories and at reformulating the migration project, once in Europe. As Schapendonk argues (2010a), once the

European mainland is reached, new opportunities can emerge for migrants within a whole new range of possible destinations inside the European Schengen-zone. Van Nieuwenhuyze (2009) in her recent work on the Senegambians' labour market experience in Europe, brings to light a phenomenon of "continuing mobility" within Europe, which may occur among some migrants. Sometimes inspired by adventure, the motivation to leave is most often the search for better work, and a better life, particularly if things are not going well. Certainly this type of fluid mobility within the European space applies in particular to young and single migrants, who can absorb faster and with less risks the costs of settlement and of residential and labour re-integration in a new country.

The following charts (Graphs 5-8) show the sequences of migrants with transit episodes (as previously defined), underlying in a complementary way to the previous group of charts, the areas preceding and following the transits.

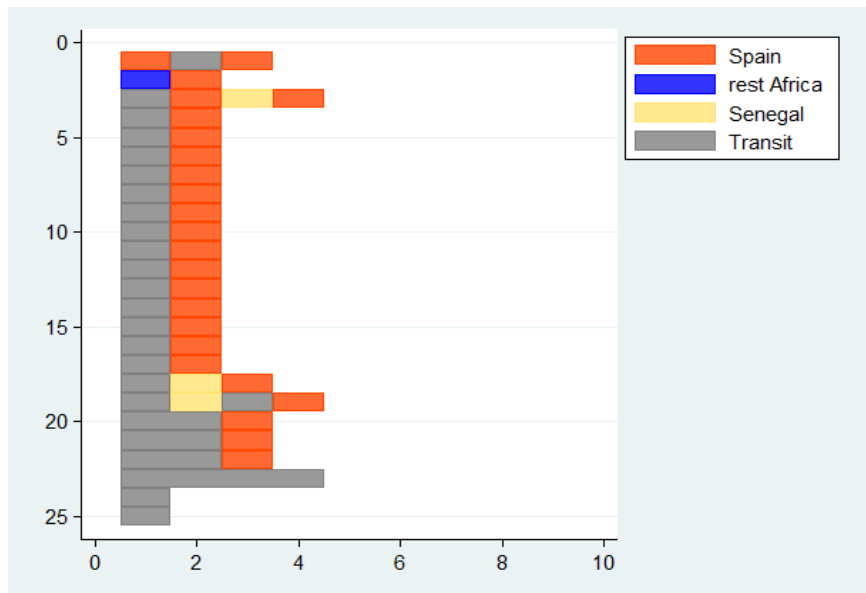
As an example we can interpret the first line at the top of the each graph. At graph n. 5 (the Spanish sample), the migrant n.1 had a first migration in Spain, then undertook a transit, afterwards he came back to Spain. It indicates that probably the transit didn't allow to reach the aimed destination, and as a makeshift, he came back to Spain. At graph. 6 the migrant went to France as a first migration, then moved to Italy, after which he undertook a transit, that finally led him to France as a stable destination.

The first line of the graph. 7 indicates that this migrant first went to Spain, then had a long-term (lasting more than a year) temporary return to Senegal, after which he/she embarked in a transit that finally let him/her reaching Italy, where he/she was interviewed in 2008.

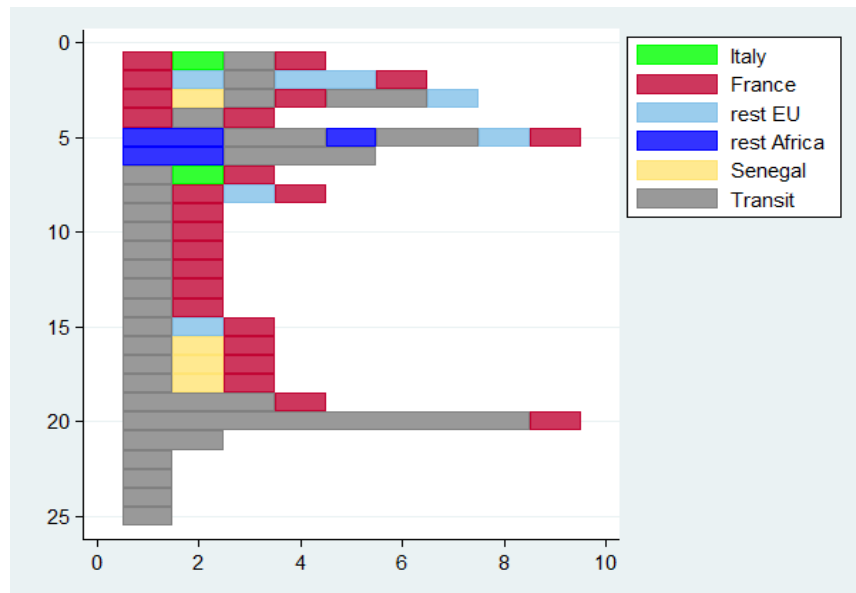
The last graph (8) shows in its first line another type of trajectory: the migrant left for France and after having spent a period there (longer than a year), he/she came back to Senegal. From here he/she undertook a transit, that, probably unsuccessfully, brought him/her back to Senegal.

SEQUENCES OF MIGRATION EPISODES (>and< 1YEAR) and TRANSITS (>and< 1 YEAR) by sample: TRANSITS WITHIN THE WHOLE MIGRATION PROCESS

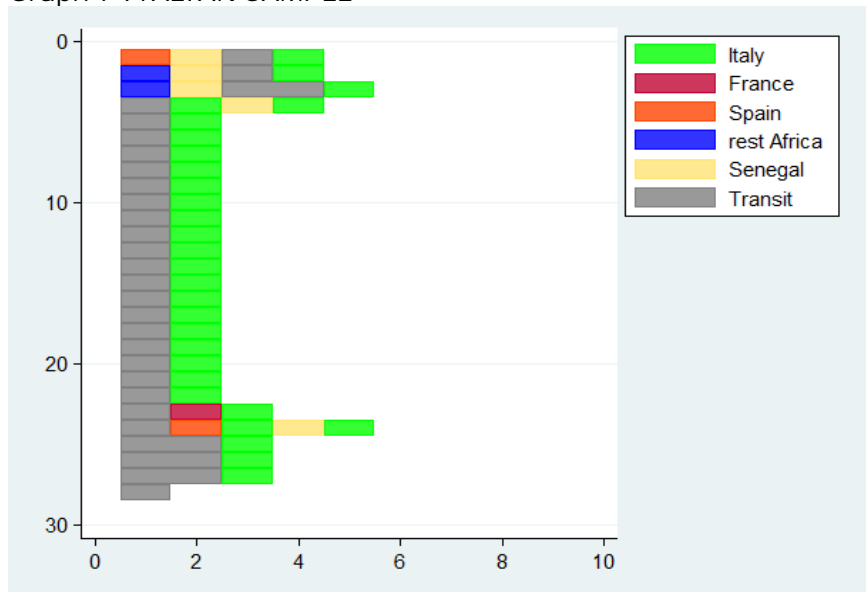
Graph 5 SPANISH SAMPLE



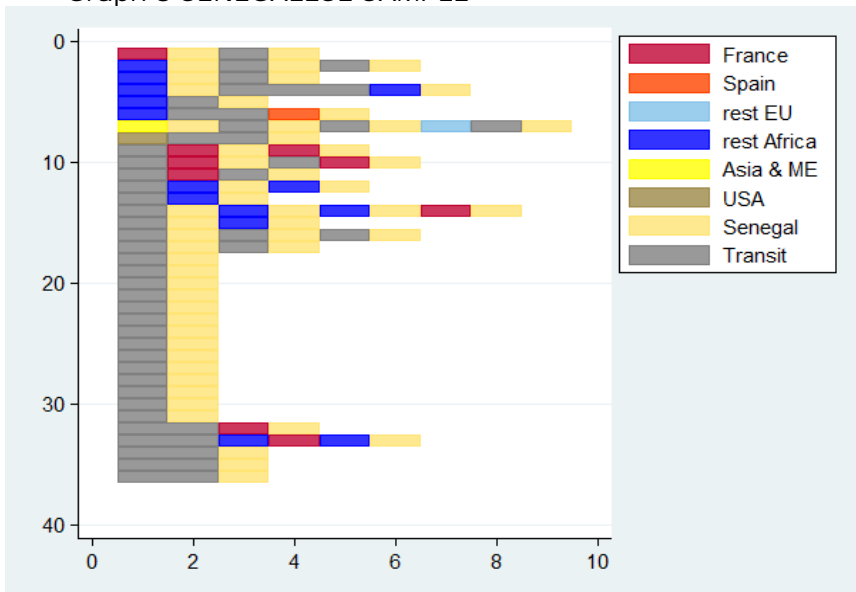
Graph 6 THE FRENCH SAMPLE



Graph 7 ITALIAN SAMPLE



Graph 8 SENEGALESE SAMPLE



These examples show how different can be migrants' experiences and paths. Despite the heterogeneity and complexity of such mobility patterns, some regularities can be highlighted.

Depending on where they have transited, migrants in fact follow different paths. Table 6 shows the areas where transit migrations lead, i.e. where migrants move after having transited.

As already mentioned, transits in France have mainly Italy and Spain as following destinations and more in general transits held in Europe mainly lead to the surveyed (European) countries, as an effect of the sample design.

As for transits undertaken in the African space (which represent 52.7% of the total of transits shown in this graph), those held in Northern Africa are mainly followed by migration to European countries (22 out of 32), while only a little share of transits occurring in Western Africa and in Central Africa (8 out of 46) are followed by migration to European countries.

The logical explanation seems that Senegalese migration passing through Northern Africa is generally more aimed at reaching Europe, and is in fact quite often successful (but, again a strong selection bias is here evident, as we miss the individuals stuck in transit African countries).

Tab. 6: Areas following transits: where transits lead

TRANSIT AREAS		FOLLOWING AREAS						
		Italy	France	Spain	rest of EU	rest of Africa	Senegal	Total
	Spain	6	9	0	0	0	2	17
	France	16	0	7	1	1	3	28
	Italy	0	2	1	0	0	1	4
Rest of EU		2	5	4	3	2	2	18
Rest of Africa	Central Africa	0	2	0	0	1	2	5
	West. Africa	0	3	0	3	14	21	41
	North. Africa	3	3	11	4	4	7	32
	Asia & ME	0	1	1	0	0	1	3
	Total	27	25	24	11	22	39	148
	%	18.2	16.9	16.2	7.4	14.9	26.4	100

Source: MAFE-Senegal Survey

This does not seem the case for transitory stays in Sub-Saharan space. Here, the analysis yields an image of a (mainly Sub-Saharan) African space dominated by short, temporary, intermittent, and circular internal migrations. This idea is further strengthened if we look at the rate of returns to Senegal after transits: over 46 transits undertaken in other sub-Saharan African countries (Western + Central African countries in the table), 23 are followed by returns to Senegal.

There are two possible explanations for this phenomenon. The first refers to failed transits, as a consequence of immigration restrictions, forcing a return to Senegal or prolonged stays in other African countries, instead of continuing to Europe. In this case, migration intentions do not match actual moves and lead to a second-best option of staying in other African countries or resettlement in the country of origin. Several studies have recently explored (Pian, 2009; Ba, Choplin 2006; Brachet, 2009; Spiga, 2006; Boubakri, Mazzella, 2006; among others) Sub-Saharan migrant

populations “stuck” in Mediterranean or other African countries, who end up working and staying in Saharan migration hubs along the way without ever reaching the desired destination.

The second explanation is that, as already highlighted by other studies (Brachet, 2006; de Haas, 2007), only a minority transiting in the African space through multiple routes actually has Europe as a final destination.

The literature on migration in general and on the transit in particular has often focused on migrants who got to or are trying to get to Europe, but has missed alternative trajectories oriented and developed within the African space. Africa in effect has been since pre-colonial times a continent on the move, in which a culture of mobility is engrained in the history, daily life and experiences of the population (de Btuijn, van Dijk, Foeken, 2001; Brachet, 2009). Tall (2006) shows how Senegalese international migration is a relatively old phenomenon, oriented to neighbouring areas (Mauritania, Mali, Guinea Conakry, Gambia, Guinea Bissau), to other West African countries (such as Côte d'Ivoire and Gabon) to those of Central African, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Cameroon, or to North Africa countries (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, etc..) through several migration sub-systems centred on continental migration poles.

West Africa is the first region hosting migration from Africa: West African migrations within the region are actually far more numerous than those directed outwards. According to Ndiaye and Robin (2010) these migrations are not replaced by extra-continental ones: on the contrary, both are increasingly articulated in complementary trend through roads, temporary living spaces, practices and new actors.

The ambiguity, or the ambivalence of transit countries, resides precisely in their being at the same time places traversed by transits, as temporary stages, as well as places of historical settlement of intra-continental migration. Bredeloup (forthcoming) points out that the Sahara is not only a space that is crossed, but also a place that is worked on, urbanized by the passage and residence of generations of migrants.

Conclusions

This paper identified key characteristics of Senegalese migration and of transit migration in particular. This study conceptualized transit migration as a specific segment within broader migration trajectories through adopting a migration life-cycle approach. The analysis compels us to question some prevalent assumptions prevalent in media, policy and academic discourses on the phenomenon of transit migration.

First of all, transits can be *short* as well as *long* migration episodes aiming at continuing migration to other countries. They are episodes that can last up to many years, and despite this duration, these prolonged stays can still be considered as provisional and oriented to onward migration. Transits are in this sense the quintessence of the precariousness of migrants' positions and the concomitant changeability of migration projects and aspirations. As they occur in different contexts they can also lead to very different outcomes. Transits enclose a project, a potential that consists of the attainment of a further migration. These projects, however, are not always successful. Opportunities and obstacles occur along the way, re-defining plans at different phases all along the trajectory.

Secondly, although transits mainly take place at the beginning of the migration career, they also occur at more advanced stages of migration careers for some migrants. For instance, they can occur as a first step out of Senegal or in between other countries along the trajectory in Africa and Europe. For some individuals transits are re-iterated, i.e. they engage in further following transits at different stages of their route.

Certainly the extension of the concept of transit as movements developed and oriented within the African space on one side, or developed and oriented within the European one on the other side, is unprecedented in the study of transits and its literature. The dominant conception of transit migration associate in fact this phenomenon to movements undertaken within the African space and necessarily directed to entry in Europe. This last type of transit has undoubtedly assumed a growing role in the entry strategies in Europe, highly visible in the media and political discourse. However, transit can also be undertaken and interpreted as a mobility strategy adopted by migrants at different moments and geographical contexts of their migration career.

The effort in this direction must be twofold and lead on the one hand to a decentralization of the European pole, which is not a necessary or unique destination of migrations from Africa. This distorted conception of transits and intra-African migrations is still a source of serious theoretical misunderstandings (and related political assumptions). It also reveals an empirical vacuum that requires to be filled. The sub-Saharan African space in fact rather emerges as a mobility area with own internal dynamics and characteristics: the data analysis yields an image of a highly circular and fluid space of mobility. Transits occurring in this zone tend to remain within the African space or lead to return to the origin country. This analysis shows the need to further gain insights into south-south intra-continental mobility. As Bakewell recommends, a further effort should therefore be done to study the intra and inter-continental migration as interconnected migration systems:

“looking at Africa in isolation can only ever yield a partial picture; equally so does looking at migration out of Africa to the exclusion of intra-continental mobility” (Bakewell, 2009:17).

On the other hand, it seems necessary to pay more attention to intra-European migration and to the role that migration policies, but also the performance and the regulation of labor markets play in shaping migrants’ mobility within EU. A broader reflection on the mobility of (non-European) migrants within the Schengen area is another equally unexplored, but important research issue. The fact that transits take place within the European space may highlight a precarisation of migration careers. This precarisation can be linked to the worsening of migrants’ legal status, not only at the moment of the entry, but also during the stay abroad on the one hand, and to the concomitant precarisation of European labor markets and labor conditions, on the other hand. In this perspective, the fragmentation of the migration paths in Europe can be read as the result of macro-structural changes in migration policies and labour markets.

As suggested in the editorial of 2009, *Cahiers de l'Urmis* (Potot, Laudanski, 2009), migrants are caught in legislative, social, economic and political constraints, which appear as inedited in the European labour market. These constraints compel migrants to adopt innovative migratory practices, among which the European internal mobility hypothesis can be an emerging strategy.

These findings highlight the need to call into question and to radically rethink conventional migration and mobility labels, by going beyond euro-centric conceptualizations and overcoming dichotomous and rigid categories of migrations and migrants (de Haas, 2007; Collyer, de Haas, forthcoming) as imposed by policy makers and the media. This research has shown how transit assume different characteristics and roles all along the life-course. This study has also showed that the whole notion of transit migration itself should be revisited in order to achieve a richer account of its diverse manifestations and its geo-spatial as well as temporal, dimensions.

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