



**Rabat Process**  
Euro-African Dialogue  
on Migration and Development

# Social immobility VERSUS social mobility

THE ROOT CAUSES  
OF INTERNATIONAL EMIGRATION

STUDY CARRIED OUT BY NELLY ROBIN  
FOR THE ICMPD

Project funded by the  
European Union



Project implemented by



# Social immobility versus social mobility

## THE ROOT CAUSES OF INTERNATIONAL EMIGRATION

Study carried out by Nelly Robin  
(French National Research Institute for Development/IRD-Population  
and Development Research Centre/CEPED)<sup>1</sup>  
for the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

*Translated into English from the original by ICMPD*

*It is easy to describe the phenomenon of emigration in political or economic terms. But there are many other motivations for wanting to do something else elsewhere. (...) there are other reasons to leave. The heart (of the novel) is that everyone has the right to make their lives wherever they want.*

*Leonardo Padura (Cuba)*

*Initially, the in-depth study on “the root causes of irregular migration in the Rabat Process region” was to take place simultaneously in Mali, Niger, Senegal and Italy. However, due to technical constraints, the survey was refocused on Senegal and Italy.*

*The results presented here confirm the relevance of this choice, particularly since they can be considered largely representative of the regional situation.*

<sup>1</sup> Nelly Robin is an expert in migration and human rights. With extensive experience in West Africa, she is a researcher and presented an HDR on the “Complexity of the West African migration system. Migrants and legal norms.” Hosted at the MIGRINTER laboratory (CNRS-University of Poitiers), her main research centre is the CEPED (IRD-Paris Descartes). Special thanks are also due to Adelina MIRANDA, anthropologist and Director of the Migrinter laboratory, who participated in the development of the methodology for this study and was involved in data collection in Italy and Senegal.

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	6
Introduction .....	8
1. The Rabat Process, a region of high mobility .....	9
1.1. More than 37 million migratory exchanges .....	9
1.2. West Africa, a dynamic and complex migratory system .....	10
2. Epistemological and methodological reflections .....	12
2.1. The “causes of irregular migration”, inappropriate wording .....	12
2.2. Focus groups and biographical interviews .....	16
2.2.1. From the rural world to the new urban peripheries .....	16
2.2.2. From Naples to Milan .....	18
3. Making the subjective viewpoint of emigration actors heard .....	20
4. Family pressures and economic vulnerabilities .....	23
4.1. The demands of family logic .....	24
4.2. Money, the cause and consequence of emigration .....	24
4.3. The vulnerability of the links between work and remuneration .....	25
4.4. Problem, a term used with a singular frequency .....	26
5. Relative frustration and inequality of opportunity .....	27
5.1. Trajectories towards social advancement, at a standstill .....	29
5.2. Devaluation of diplomas and downgrading on the labour market .....	30
5.3. Extended family relationships, an ambiguous issue .....	32
5.3.1. Birth right called into question by the youngest child’s emigration .....	32
5.3.2. Neighbourhood relationships and “social burden” .....	33
6. Emigration, a long and complex proces .....	35
Conclusion .....	38
List of figures .....	39

## Executive Summary

The study on “*the root causes of irregular migration in the Rabat Process region*” – initially carried out to inform discussions at the thematic meeting on this issue, organised by France in Paris in October 2018 as part of the Rabat Process – aims to inform scientific and political debates on recent international migration.

Favouring a qualitative approach, this study proposes to examine the causes of emigration in the Rabat Process region from the perspective of the main actors of migration – aspiring migrants, migrants and their families. The aim is not only to go beyond the approach which explains migration as the result of purely external determinants (economic, demographic, environmental, political factors), but also to move away from the idea that the causes of “irregular” and “regular” migration are distinct.

In order to deepen the meaning which individuals give to their choice to migrate or stay, the study is based on data collected during biographical interviews and focus groups, thus articulating the individual and collective levels. The testimonies on which the study is based were collected in Senegal and Italy, two countries that have a special place in the field of migration in the Rabat Process region: Italy is the leading European country of African immigration; Senegal is the first country of origin of sub-Saharan immigrants in Italy. In Senegal, a country with a long migration history, interviews and focus groups were conducted in the regions of Dakar, Diourbel and Thiès. These three areas are located in different socio-economic contexts but all have many aspiring migrants, and were chosen because they are likely to shed light on the causes of international emigration in all its complexity. In Italy, two cities were selected: Naples, a city of first arrival, and Milan, where migrants can take a look back at their journeys.

In order to take into account the subjective point of view of actors of emigration and to ensure that their voices are heard, the testimonies collected were processed using textual statistical analysis. This method is used to extract “macroscopic” syntheses of a large amount of information, collected at individual (“microscopic”) level. The transcripts of the different focus groups were brought together and examined using software, which made it possible to carry out a lexical analysis based on frequency statistics and the proximity between the words used. The causes of emigration, as depicted by the actors, were then reflected in a series of maps.

The statistical processing, the results of which are modelled in the study, revealed that the term “family” had the highest number of occurrences. Eight other words appeared more than 100 times: *money, child, problem, work, canoe, country, life* and *immigration*. Based on this data, the study draws two main conclusions:

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Firstly, family pressures and economic vulnerabilities are important causes of emigration. The term *family* is often associated with the word *child* – which in this case refers to an individual aged 17 to 25 years – thereby underlining the importance of filial duties. The testimonies describe the family, as well as the entourage (friends, neighbours), as a factor of emigration. Many migrants are first and foremost *children*, and their project to migrate aims at “satisfying the needs of the family”. The term *money* is also central. Both a cause and consequence of emigration, money can be a factor which encourages departure, which guides the migration process and contributes to the success of the migratory project. The word *money* is also often associated with *work*: the question of fair remuneration is referred to by the interviewees, the latter have the feeling that fair remuneration does not depend on the work carried out but rather on the place where it is carried out. The interviews collected highlight this *problem*: if the work carried out no longer leads to financial consideration, then it deprives the family of basic resources and the status of this low-paid *child* is weakened with regards to his/her siblings and community in general. Emigration thus appears to be the solution.

Secondly, relative frustration and unequal opportunities emerge as reasons for emigration in the discourses of the actors interviewed. They testify to a governance crisis – insufficient public action in the education sector, loss of confidence in the political system and lack of transparency in the management of private companies – increasing inequalities. The devaluation of diplomas, downgrading on the labour market and remuneration perceived as too low create a feeling of social immobility. Emigration appears therefore to be the best way to increase one’s income, to have one’s skills recognised (not in the country of destination, but in the country of origin in the event of a return) and to improve one’s social status. This last point is a major one: as H. Bréant, S. Chauvin and A. Portilla remind us “migratory projects are almost never thought of as ends in themselves and overwhelmingly pose migration as a means of maintaining or improving one’s social status and that of one’s family not in the ‘host’ country but in the country of origin”<sup>2</sup>.

The feeling of social relegation of those who remain in relation to those who have emigrated is also a central element in the implementation of a migratory project. Indeed, the person who has left, notably through remittances, acquires a special status in the family, or even in the community. Migration of the younger child has the effect of recomposing the family hierarchy; personal initiative replaces the birth right of the eldest child. The question of the social recognition of the “mother” is also central: the family member who emigrates can offer his/her mother a better status within the family or community. Therefore, not engaging in an emigration process can appear to be symbolic of indifference towards the family. The reconstitution of extended family and neighbourhood relationships created by migration thus broadens the spectrum of aspiring migrants, seeking the same status as those who have left. In this context, Senegal’s long migration history – on which the imagination of a collective identity is based – underpins current emigration processes and partly explains that known risks are overcome.

Current emigration can therefore be understood through an “integrated” approach, seen as a process, modelled as follows: departure, i.e. *realisation* is preceded by two preliminary phases, *collective intention* and *individualised decision*, both influenced by a variety of social, economic and political factors. In this approach, it is important not to omit discontinuities and breaks; the prospective emigrant experiences the precariousness and uncertainty of migration, before embarking on the multiple pathways of the migratory journey, which constitutes a key segment of the migratory project.

It therefore appears that today, it is less the inequalities between the South and the North than the inequality of opportunities and the feeling of immobility and social injustice in the country of origin, which explain emigration.

<sup>2</sup> Bréant Hugo, Sébastien Chauvin, and Ana Portilla. “Social capital and the challenges of international migration”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 225, n° 5, 2018, 9 pg.

## Introduction

The study on “*the root causes of irregular migration in the Rabat Process region*”, initially carried out to feed into discussions at the thematic meeting on this issue, organised by France in Paris in October 2018 as part of the Rabat Process, aims to inform scientific and political debates on recent international migration.

Over the past thirty years, a great deal of research has been carried out to identify and understand the socio-economic determinants of international emigration, most often through quantitative analyses.

The scientific research presented here aims to go beyond this statistical perspective. It adopts a qualitative approach. Ultimately, it is a matter of making the migrant’s point of view heard.

The study begins with a synthesis of migration exchanges in the Rabat Process region. This is followed by an epistemological and methodological reflection, designed to take into account the subjective point of view of the actors of emigration (i.e. aspiring migrants, migrants, family, siblings, peers, entourage). The analysis of their words, gathered in focus groups and individual interviews in Senegal and Italy, opens the door for new questions on family logic, relative frustration and inequality of opportunity, considered as key factors in current emigration. The study ends with an attempt to model the emigration process, which has become long and complex.

## 1. The Rabat Process, a region of high mobility

As several authors have pointed out, “African migration (to Europe) is not massive either from the point of view of the countries of departure or from the point of view of the countries of arrival. There is no invasion or exodus” (Lessault, Beauchemin, 2009)<sup>3</sup>.

### 1.1. More than 37 million migratory exchanges

Migratory exchanges between Rabat Process countries confirm this trend (Table 1). In 2017, the 58 countries of the Rabat Process recorded more than 37 million migratory exchanges. This political dialogue therefore covers an area of high mobility, which equally combines South-South migration between African countries and South-North migration between Africa and the EU, mainly from North Africa. Sub-Saharan migration, on the other hand, occurs mainly within and between West and Central Africa.

### Migration exchanges between Rabat Process countries, 2017

(Persons residing in a country other than their country of birth)

Migration exchanges	Number	%
Between European countries	22,703,406	61
Between African countries	7,510,813	20
Between African and European countries	7,052,637	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,266,856</b>	<b>100</b>

Source : United Nations, 2017.

Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

<sup>3</sup> Lessault D. and Beauchemin C. 2009. “Neither Invasion nor Exodus”, A Statistical Overview of Migration from sub-Saharan Africa [Online], vol. 25 – n° 1 | 2009, put online on 01 June 2012, consulted on 17 April 2019. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/remi/4889>

## 1.2. West Africa, a dynamic and complex migratory system

Among the three African regions of the Rabat Process, the dynamism of West Africa can immediately be seen: it is reflected in alliances of variable geometry; all national entities are involved; new transversal approaches are combined with “traditional” approaches of proximity, and, through a complex set of scales, they build a “networked” territory.

**Figure 1**  
Migratory exchanges between the African countries of the Rabat Process, situation in 2017



## 1. THE RABAT PROCESS, A REGION OF HIGH MOBILITY

In Central Africa, the major migration axis links the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and Cameroon, itself connected to West Africa via Nigeria. North Africa is characterised by few transnational links and few connections with other regions of Africa. The situation is clear: from one region to another, the spatial structure of migration is very different.

In Figure 1, the West African migratory system appears to be the most active and complex. No other African region of the Rabat Process has such a high density of migratory exchanges. Obviously, their development and regulation require regionalisation: that is, the use of regional proximity. Thus, within the transnational framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the study of migration reveals two major geographical combinations: one is characterised by a strong relationship between Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, extended to Mali; the other, structured around Ghana and Nigeria, presents a more complex configuration, which is open to the whole regional area.

Recent developments, following the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, are encouraging the construction of a **new migratory system, based on “a combinatorial process of migration fields”**<sup>4</sup>. With Ghana and Nigeria as places of polarity, it combines local mobility around these two entities with new migration, which links these two migration fields together, and links each with other migration fields. There are many interactions with the Atlantic fields, organised around Senegal, Gambia and Guinea (Conakry), or with the countries of the Sahel fringe (Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger); both are themselves linked to the migration field of Central Africa, formed around the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Gabon and Cameroon.

In this environment, Senegalese emigration has a particular feature: it is characterised by a comparable dynamic, whether it is oriented towards Africa (43%) or the EU (48%)<sup>5</sup>.

These few statistical elements highlight how much a study on the causes of emigration in the Rabat Process region requires a comprehensive approach, including both South-South and South-North migration.

<sup>4</sup> Simon G., 2008. 2008. *La planète migratoire dans la mondialisation*. Armand Colin, Paris, 255 pg.

<sup>5</sup> Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017.

## 2. Epistemological and methodological reflections

Beforehand, it is essential to conduct an epistemological and methodological reflection in order to position our study, justify its foundations and explain its innovative approach.

### 2.1. The “causes of irregular migration”, inappropriate wording

In this sense, a critical analysis of scientific and institutional productions on the “root causes” of irregular migration in the Rabat Process region was carried out by L. Bacon and N. Robin<sup>6</sup>. A synthesis of this *State of the Art* makes it possible to identify the different key ideas, contributions, limitations and gaps in the existing body of work.

From the outset, the first observation is the absence of a universal definition of “irregular migration”. Nevertheless, some international institutions or organisations have tried to define its contours. For example, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which in its glossary of key migration terms, gives the following definition: “international migration that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries”. IOM also introduces an element of distinction with the term “illegal migration” and calls for its use to be restricted to “cases of trafficking in persons and smuggling of migrants”.

At the same time, in many texts, the term “irregular migration” is associated with the term “problem”. As an illustration, we can cite some examples from different reports:

- › Whether it is the “problem of irregular migration of sub-Saharanans” in Morocco<sup>7</sup>;
- › To “address the problem of illegal immigration” in Mauritania<sup>8</sup>;
- › Or the “problem of irregular immigration” in Mali<sup>9</sup>; this type of migration – as opposed to regular migration – is identified as a problem in itself.

However, in these same texts, it is not so much “irregular migration” that is described as a problem as the “root causes” which underlie it. Thus, a lexical field is regularly associated with the terms “irregular migration” and “problem”: the terms “root”, “reason”, “origin”, “genesis”, “factor”, “root causes”. In this context, a “problem” may refer to both a “theoretical or practical question

<sup>6</sup> Bacon L. and Robin N., 2018. *The State of the Art. The root causes of irregular migration in the Rabat Process Region*. ICMPD, 22 pg.

<sup>7</sup> Elmadmad K., 2008. *Migration irrégulière et migration illégale : l'exemple des migrants subsahariens au Maroc*. Series: “CARIM AS”, n° 49, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies San Domenico di Fiesole (FO), European University Institute, 16 pg.

<sup>8</sup> Salem Z.A., 2010. *La migration irrégulière de, vers et à travers la Mauritanie : quelques aspects sociopolitiques*. Series: “CARIM AS”, n° 58, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies San Domenico di Fiesole (FO), European University Institute, 6 pg.

<sup>9</sup> Dembele D., 2010. *Le Mali et la migration irrégulière*. Series: “CARIM AS”, n° 39, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies San Domenico di Fiesole (FO), European University Institute, 13 pg.

which is difficult to resolve or the solution to which remains uncertain”, a “thing whose nature is difficult to determine, or which cannot be explained or conceived”, or, according to a more sociological definition of the term, a “situation considered as threatening to certain values of civilisation in a given society”<sup>10</sup>. “Irregular migration” would therefore constitute a “problem” which must – in the most neutral terms – be “solved”, “answered” and “sorted out” or which – in more offensive terms – it is necessary to “fight against” or to “tackle”.

Addressing the “root causes of irregular migration” requires identifying these causes in advance. Since 2008, several analyses have been published on a number of countries without fully covering the Rabat Process region<sup>11</sup>. But whatever the country, the same factors are always put forward to explain what motivates departure: economic factors (poverty, economic crisis and external debt burden), demographic factors (population growth, urban growth), environmental factors (drought, pressure on natural resources) and politics. These so-called “push” factors are combined with so-called “pull” factors, particularly linked to the demand for labour in specific sectors – both in African and European countries.

Thus, to solve the “problem” of “irregular migration”, the global approach on migration offers two options:

- › the first concerns the fight against irregular immigration and the adoption of security measures;
- › the second aims to establish a comprehensive dialogue with third countries to “address the root causes of migration”.

This second proposal, which is considered a long-term option, is based on the assumption that helping countries of origin would encourage prospective migrants to stay in their home countries rather than to embark on migration journeys. The implementation of Official Development Assistance policies is the purpose of this argument. If the European Union helps countries of origin to develop – economically, socially, politically and environmentally – then their populations will be dissuaded from the idea of leaving: there will no longer be any reason to leave their country of origin to move to Europe. “Irregular migration” will cease to exist. When stated in this way, the reasoning seems perfectly logical. However, the reality is different: regardless of the level of development assistance, “irregular migration”, although it has not increased, has not decreased either.

Indeed, recent scientific analyses question this logical articulation and (1) put into perspective the “problematic” nature of “irregular migration”, (2) identify other factors for migration other than economic and political instability, and (3) express reservations about Official Development Assistance as the solution to the “problem”.

According to the body of scientific work explored in the above-mentioned document *The State of the Art*, it seems that “irregular migration” is in fact less “undesirable” than some reports suggest. As sociologist H. De Haas<sup>12</sup> explains, European economies need this irregular and cheap labour. The same applies to the economies of the Maghreb countries. From the perspective of sub-Saharan countries of origin, trade and business activities (including informal ones) and remittances are also beneficial to local economies and constitute a source of stability and a vital resource for their development. The latest World Bank report estimates the increase in remittances to low- and middle-income countries at 8.5% for the year 2017. According to these estimates, the amount of remit-

<sup>10</sup> CNRTL, 2012 [online].

<sup>11</sup> Data for the other countries of the Rabat Process – Cabo Verde, Chad, Congo, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone - remain incomplete. In any case, no CARIM or IOM reports have been produced on these countries in particular.

<sup>12</sup> De Haas H., 2008 « The myth of invasion. The inconvenient realities of African migration to Europe ». *Third World Quarterly*, 29 (7), pp. 1305–1322.

tances is 466 billion dollars, a new record<sup>13</sup>. In the same year, Senegal received 2.2 billion dollars from its nationals abroad, more than twice the amount of Official Development Assistance. Thus, “European and African States seem to have little genuine interest in stopping migration”<sup>14</sup> since it seems essential to their respective economic functioning.

At the same time, in order to put into perspective the “problematic” nature of “irregular migration” from the African continent to Europe, other scientific studies<sup>15</sup> have shown that:

- › people from the Southern Sahara represent a minority of the flows and numbers of migrants in Europe;
- › sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world where emigration to the North is the lowest;
- › departures abroad are largely directed towards neighbouring countries within the African continent.

F. Heran<sup>16</sup> reinforces these observations and invalidates the thesis that (1) “the young Africa will rush to the Old Continent”, (2) “it is part of the order of things”, and (3) “a quarter of Europe’s inhabitants will be African in 2050”.

On the other hand, it shows that if we integrate the demographic growth projected by the UN, sub-Saharan migrants may occupy an increasing place in Northern societies, but they will remain a very small minority: at most 3% to 4% of the population by 2050 – far from the 25% feared.

Recent scientific work also calls for a rethinking of the link between migration and development. The idea that it is not the poorest who migrate dates back to the work of G. Simon<sup>17</sup>. Three related ideas follow; first, the factor of poverty or destitution alone is not valid: people do not leave their country solely for economic reasons; second, it has been shown that migration tends to increase the development of countries of origin, in particular through remittances, the transfer of funds and job creation by migrants; and finally, many studies show that development increases, rather than curbs, mobility.

Hence our desire to go beyond the approach whereby migration is explained by external factors, and to consider emigration “from within”<sup>18</sup>, to place ourselves from the point of view of the first actors of migration – aspiring migrants or those who have experienced migration.

The study presented here sits precisely within this scientific horizon. Firstly, it is a question of deconstructing the idea that the causes of “irregular” and “regular” migration are distinct. People who undertake to leave do not choose to migrate irregularly. There are no migrants who decide to migrate in a “regular” way and those who decide to migrate in an “irregular” way; there are no root causes of “regular” migration on the one hand, and no root causes of “irregular” migration on the other. There is, initially, a migratory project and a decision to leave, and it is only at the stage of the migratory project’s implementation, the journey, that migration can become – possibly – irregular.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, 2017. *Migrations and Remittances. Recent development and outlook. Special topic: transit migration*, pg 3.

<sup>14</sup> De Haas H., 2008. “Migration irrégulière d’Afrique Occidentale en Afrique du Nord et en Union Européenne : une vue d’ensemble des tendances générales”. *Series Migration Research*, n° 32, pg 10.

<sup>15</sup> Flahaux, Beauchemin, Schoumaker, 2010: pg.3, Robin, 2014: pg. 20–3.

<sup>16</sup> Héran F., 2018. *Europe and the Spectre of Sub-Saharan Migration. Population and Societies*, n° 558, September 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Op.cit, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Ma Mung E., 2009. “Le point de vue de l’autonomie dans l’étude des migrations internationales : penser de l’intérieur les phénomènes de mobilité”, in F.Dureau et M.A.Hily, *Les mondes en mobilité*. Presses de l’Université de Rennes, pg 25–38.

If the relevant issue is that of “causes”, then we defend here the need to move away from the term “irregular” and to deal with causes without distinguishing between regular and irregular migration. Moreover, in the speeches we collected, the notion of “legal migration” is formulated, but the term irregularity is replaced by “risk”, “danger” and “death”.

Whether they favour an approach based on external determinants – i.e. migration is caused by differences in living standards between countries of origin and destination – or whether they focus on internal determinants – i.e. people choose to leave after having weighed up the disadvantages and advantages to be gained by migration – research on the “root causes of irregular migration” is based on the same premise: inequality in the distribution of goods causes people to move. This leads to two related ideas: (1) since migration is determined by certain factors, knowledge of these factors should allow us to explain migration; (2) migration is the result of mechanisms which operate at the macro-economic or individual level<sup>19</sup>.

While we cannot deny that the hope of a better life has an effect on the movement of individuals or groups, these economics-based<sup>20</sup> and deterministic conceptions of migration remain partial and insufficient for a full understanding of the causes of migration today

By defending the need to adopt a different point of view and to formulate new questions, our analyses invite us to go beyond approaches which emphasise economic causality, as well as those which favour the “adventurous paradigm”.

As an alternative to restrictive mechanical and economic explanations on the one hand, or essentialist and psychological explanations on the other, the study presented here aims to “literally put these migratory experiences into words” through focus groups, in order to demonstrate that the causes of emigration can only be considered as “a complex set of positions, arrangements and subjective contextualisations leading to choices, compromises, wishes and considerations which resonate in a different way for everyone”<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Op.cit, 2009, pg. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Op.cit, 2009, pg. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Canut C. et Sow A., 2014. “The voice of migration: Speeches, stories and artistic productions” *Cahiers d’études africaines [en ligne]*, pg.12.

2.2. Focus groups and biographical interviews

With this in mind, the qualitative approach has been favoured; the objective is to deepen the meaning and the significance which individuals give to their choice to migrate or to stay. We therefore adopted two survey techniques, **biographical interviews** and **focus groups** in order to express the individual and collective levels. It is about promoting the flow of speech between people who have had a similar experience and who, through confrontation and comparison, can express their feelings, their reasons and clarify parts of their individual experiences. The biographical interviews allow us to deepen our knowledge of the migratory project, and to understand how it takes shape and how it may change as the migration experience progresses. The focus group also gives the non-migrant a real place and makes it possible to gather views from the members of the actor-migrant's close circle (family, friends, etc.) in order to understand their involvement in the various decision-making processes, both at the outset and during the migratory process.

The research tools chosen give a central role to the researcher and his/her ability to listen. As a result, it is not simply a matter of asking questions, but of being able to solicit individual and collective reflection. In addition, it is important to ensure the right conditions for the most accurate transcription of interviews and focus groups possible. Sometimes, the meaning and the significance which individuals give to their experiences is hidden behind silence, behind words and sentences which are only revealed after careful listening. In this sense, it is also important to recreate the setting in which the interviews and focus groups were conducted, in order to better understand the dynamics of speech.

Senegal has a long migration history, rooted in different social realities. In this sense, this country offers the opportunity to carry out an extended panel of focus groups and individual interviews, likely to shed light on the causes of international emigration in all their complexity. The focus group members selected have a shared identity, built around a common place, a community of belonging or a collective project. At the same time, the set-up of focus groups and individual interviews in Italy is not intended to be comparative, but rather to promote the flow of speech between people who have had a similar experience and can look back on their initial choices.

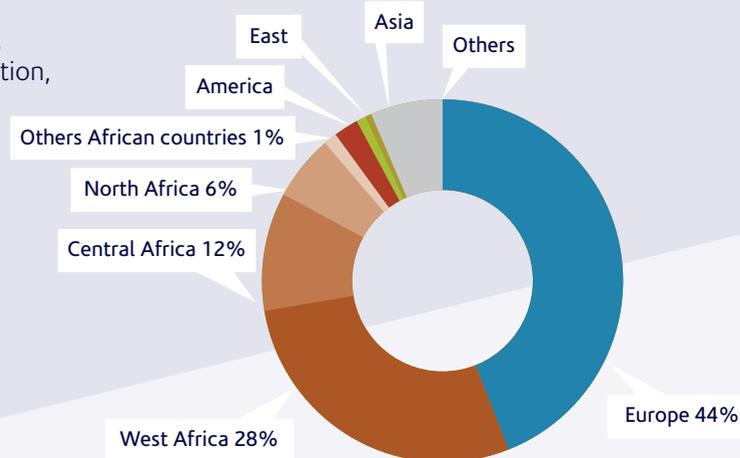
In addition, Senegal and Italy have a special place in the migratory scope of the Rabat Process: Italy is the leading European country of African immigration; Senegal is the first country of origin of sub-Saharan immigrants in Italy.

2.2.1. From the rural world to the new urban peripheries

Senegal presents a diversity of profiles and points of view, which allow a better understanding of the context and temporalities in which the decision to migrate is made, or not. The survey sites selected associate South-South and South-North emigration areas which meet the following criteria: they have (1) been part of the history of migration for a long time, (2) have different socio-economic contexts, and are characterised by (3) a strong presence of aspiring migrants.

On this basis, three recent emigration regions were selected: Dakar, Diourbel and Thiès (Figure 2). The regions of Matam and Saint-Louis, respectively the second and third largest emigration region in Senegal, were excluded because the emigration there dates back further.

Figure 2 International emigrants by sub-regional destination, Senegal, 2013



Source: ANSD, RGPFAE, 2013

The cities and districts in which the focus groups were conducted were as follows:

- › in the Dakar region, the commune of **Yeumbeul nord**, located on the outskirts of the Dakar urban area; it is home to a young population created as the result of rural exodus and heavily affected by unemployment;
- › in the Thiès region, the **Ablaye Yakhine Niakhite** district of the city of Thiès was chosen for its Mouride identity and the economic vulnerability of its population. At the same time, focus groups were conducted in **Mbour**, a fishing port, where departures to the Canary Islands are organised and where potential emigrants from all over the country and neighbouring countries transit by sea;
- › in the Diourbel region, the small town of **Bambey**, located in the heart of the groundnut basin, reflects the realities of a rural environment in crisis; it has both the lowest literacy rate and the highest unemployment rate of the four sites selected for this study (Figures 3 and 4).

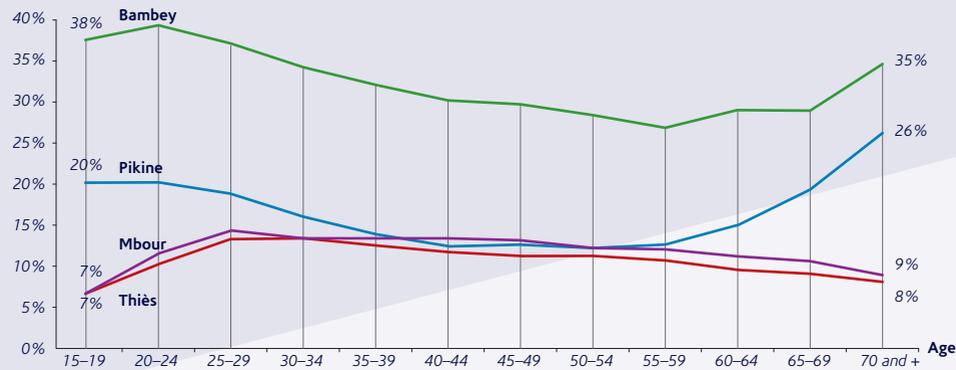
Figure 3 French literacy rate by department and age group, Senegal, 2013



Source: ANSD, RGPFAE, 2013

\* Dakar literacy rates are given for the whole region and all languages combined (Regional Report, Graph 3.3, pg. 47).

**Figure 4**  
Unemployment rate by age group and department, Senegal, 2013



Source : ANSD, RGPHAE, 2013

However, Italy is the main country of entry for Senegalese nationals into Europe. Entries have risen sharply since 2014 and they exceeded the 10,000 threshold in 2017 (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**  
Evolution of Senegalese immigration to Italy and Spain between 2008 and 2017

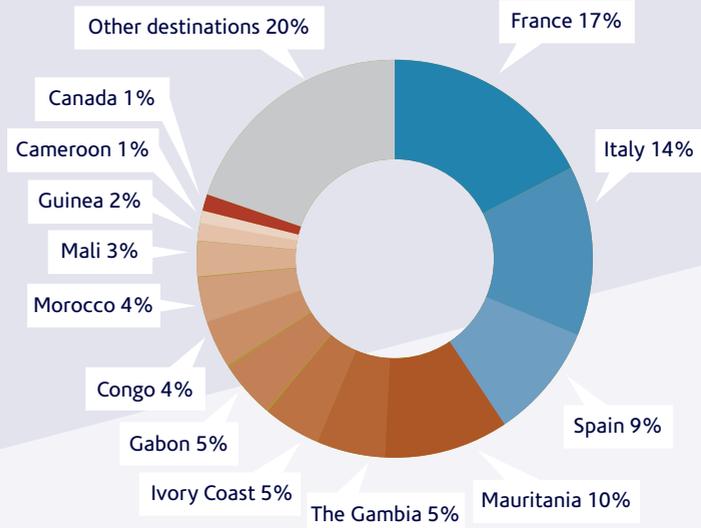


Source : EUROSAT, Immigration by age group, sex and country of birth, updated on 16.04.2019.

**2.2.2. From Naples to Milan**

Italy is the second most important host country for Senegalese emigrants, after France (Figure 5).

**Figure 5**  
International emigrants by country of destination, Senegal, 2013



Source : ANSD, RGPHAE, 2013

To understand this recent emigration, two cities were selected: **Naples**, a place of first arrival, and **Milan** where migrants can look back on the different periods of immigration in Italy. We observed that there was a marked difference between the discourses collected in the South of the country where migrants do not yet feel that they have “arrived in Europe”, and the North of the country, where migrants tend towards a more political narrative.

### 3. Making the subjective viewpoint of emigration actors heard

The objective is to **take into account the subjective viewpoint of migration actors** (non-migrants, prospective emigrants, current migrants and returning migrants) to **ensure they are heard**, and to describe the conditions under which emigration processes are constructed.

With this in mind, textual statistical analysis is used as a “discovery operator”. It is used to extract “macroscopic” syntheses of a large amount of information, collected at individual (“microscopic”) level. Connecting together the results of focus groups within a body of work, and interactively analysing the results with the help of software, gives us the opportunity to discover unexpected realities. Thus, textual statistical analysis is not intended to search for the linguistic meaning of the words studied. The objective is to consider the meaning of words in their context, i.e. “by assuming that the meanings of these words represent practices, habits and ways of doing things which are always localised (...) It is not only a matter of basing oneself on the referential value of the statements, but also of seeking to identify the processes which contributed to their creation.”<sup>22</sup> According to this logic, the maps proposed by the textual statistical analysis aim to capture and describe the causes of emigration in the words of the actors. In light of this statement, textual statistical analysis gives a prominent place to the words by which the emigration process takes shape. We thus adopt an analytical posture as proposed by Demazière and Dubar, who consider that “it is through the social categorisation used in a biographical narrative that the subject structures the meaning of his ‘social world’, that he/she creates it and can appropriate it, making it possible for the researcher to methodically interpret it”<sup>23</sup>. This combination of methods, social sciences and mathematical sciences is new in the study of migratory phenomena; it expands the field of research into “words of migration”<sup>24</sup>.

The **focus groups**, held in Senegal (8 groups, 160 respondents, 4 sites) and Italy (3 groups, 25 respondents, 2 sites), were analysed independently of each other; each collection meeting a specific objective:

- › in Senegal: to bring together a diversity of profiles and points of view, rooted in localised areas in order to better understand the context and temporalities in which emigration is or is not built;
- › in Italy: to promote the flow of speech between people who have had a similar experience in order to obtain a retrospective look at the decision to emigrate and at different periods in time.

<sup>22</sup> Seferdjeli L., “L’entretien comme mise en discours des représentations?” In *Paroles de praticiens et description de l’activité*, edited by I. Plazaola Giger et al, De Boeck Supérieur, 2007, pg. 171.

<sup>23</sup> Demazière D., Dubar C., *Analyse des entretiens biographiques : l’exemple des récits d’insertion*, Paris, Nathan, 1997, pg. 37.

<sup>24</sup> “Les mots de la migration”, *Revue Cahiers d’études africaines*, 2014, n° 213–214.

### 3. MAKING THE SUBJECTIVE VIEWPOINT OF EMIGRATION ACTORS HEARD

The individual **interviews** (8 in Senegal and 4 in Italy) provide the physical, material, social and legal context of the emigration sites, and describe the risks and opportunities around which the migration experience is formulated once the decision to migrate has been taken.

Language is “the mediator par excellence of both the construction of a real world of objects and subjects, the organisation of experience and the formation of thought in expression”<sup>25</sup>. It leads to a “sharing of experiences” combining the designation of objects or subjects and the qualification of subjective experiences from which people acquire knowledge or review this knowledge<sup>26</sup>.

Language thus offers the researcher the opportunity to access the perceptions of emigration actors; these constitute a guide to discover the aspirations and choices of the migration actors, and the modalities of their implementation according to variable contexts and temporalities.

In this perspective, it is not a question of treating each focus group separately, but of considering the whole, the corpus, as a coherent entity<sup>27</sup>. Mr. Reinert<sup>28</sup> specifies that in order to obtain a meaningful result, two conditions must be verified:

- › the corpus must be presented as a whole with certain coherence: coherence of production conditions or thematic coherence. Here, all focus groups were collected from comparable panels at the same time and according to a common interview grid.
- › the corpus must be large enough for the statistical element to be a component of the analysis. The 8 focus groups in Senegal have 160 people; the speeches collected include more than 66,931 occurrences and 4,642 different forms.

Once these conditions are met, it is useful to recall some contextual elements before giving details on the chosen method, textual statistical analysis (or *text mining*). Then, having highlighted the most significant words, it will be a question of exploring the “why” of the importance of each of them and explaining how they emerged.

The focus groups were organised around the following themes: impression of the current migration context; description of one’s family environment, including or not including migration actors; intentions (emigration/non-migration); conditions (institutional, socio-economic and cultural environment, information, etc.) which need to be met for decision-making/implementation; (possibly) conditions of the migration journey and conditions required to carry out the migratory project (social networks, dispersed siblings, migration policies, etc.); reasons and conditions for return; changes observed in environment and society of origin; and current intentions (plan to emigrate again?).

Those tasked with transcribing the focus groups were instructed to transcribe the participants’ responses as accurately as possible, without correction, and then to add the context of the interview (place, date, environment, etc.). This information, as well as the age and gender of the participants, could be used as metadata associated with focus groups.

<sup>25</sup> Quéré L., “Sociolinguistique sémantique : le langage dans l’organisation sociale de l’expérience”, *Sociétés contemporaines*, 1994, n° 18–19, pg 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ferry J.M., *Les puissances de l’expérience. Tome 1*, Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 1991, pg. 89.

<sup>27</sup> To prepare the corpus, we made some corrections: we harmonised the writing of the same word or object (pick-up-4 x 4, bus-coaches, etc.) in the same format.

<sup>28</sup> Reinert M., *Alceste version 4.0 (juin 1997). Cahier 1. Premier contact et description du rapport d’analyse. Alceste AD-Cahier 1*, 2000.

With a great diversity of points of view, focus groups testify to the causes of emigration, without seeking to capture situations in an exhaustive manner. The discourse is therefore valuable here because of the multiplicity of experiences it reveals; through it, a great diversity of perceptions and interpretations, comments and judgements are called into question. The issue is not so much to consider speech as a reliable expression, as to discover what we share through it, and the questions to which it leads us. With that in mind, although focus groups form a corpus of real language and bring together qualitative information, we have opted for a lexical analysis based on frequency statistics<sup>29</sup> and the proximity between the words used<sup>30</sup>. We looked at different software methods, and selected R and IRaMuTeQ; these two software items are available under free license.

Much more than simple software, R is a statistical programming and data analysis language that is recognised and used by a significant proportion of the international community. Its development is continuous and its features are improving with each new edition. One of R's main assets is its operation from command libraries. The tm library is dedicated to statistical text analysis and corpus management. The instructions are designed specifically to be able to take into account such large volumes of data. These libraries form an ecosystem in continuous development, at the interface between academic research and practitioners. IRaMuTeQ (Multidimensional Text and Questionnaire Analysis) is a free graphical interface developed by P. Ratinaud based on R and also on the Python computer language.

The first step consists of creating a lexicon of words in the lemmatised corpus<sup>31</sup>. Interactive processing is then carried out on this lexicon: search for shapes, occurrences, the average number of occurrences per text, the number of shapes per story, the average number of characters per shape, frequency distribution on the global corpus, by focus groups or according to the modalities of the variables stored in the metadata (here: location of focus group, age and gender of participants).

The calculation of the statistical properties of the corpus reveals surprising results, which raise new questions; this leads us to return to the text at certain lexical entries. Throughout the analysis, the voices of emigration actors are quoted.

## 4. Family pressures and economic vulnerabilities

The first statistical treatments yield an unexpected result: the term *family* is the most represented (240 times). Then, eight terms appear more than 100 times: *money, child, problem, work, canoe, country, life and immigration*<sup>32</sup>.

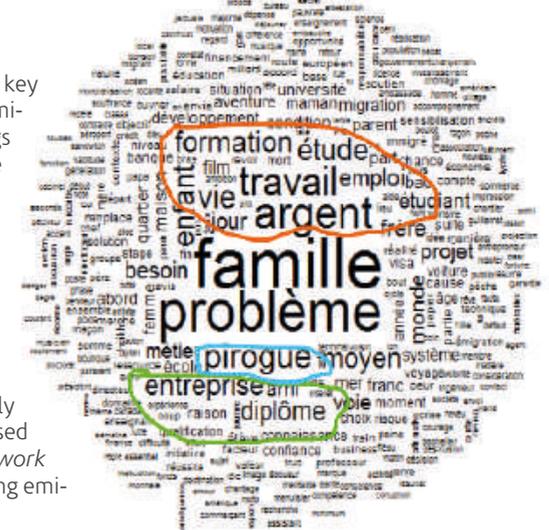
To deepen the analysis, we have chosen:

- › a **word cloud** as a tool for visualising key words in the discourse on the causes of emigration<sup>34</sup>. The first word cloud brings together all forms of common nouns; the second is composed of the same forms, those with at least 25 occurrences;
- › a **dendrogram**<sup>35</sup> which produces geographical, social and political groupings, generated by a hierarchical classification of discourses on the causes of emigration.

On the word cloud (Figure 7), the term *family* is central; on either side, a diagonal composed of the words *problem, child, money and work* provides the essential axes for problematising emigration.

Figure 7  
Word cloud<sup>36</sup>

Focus Groups and Interviews conducted in Yeumbeul, A. Yakhine N. (Thiès), Mbour, Bambye



<sup>32</sup> That is 165, 165, 148, 148, 147, 131, 127, 102 and 101 occurrences respectively.

<sup>33</sup> In the speeches collected, the term "immigration" is most often used to refer to facts or processes of emigration. Examples: "with regards to immigration, I think I would wait until I'm 40 years old before emigrating"; "in fact, immigration as such is not so bad because when you leave, you think you'll come back"; "young people can't find a job here and want to help their parents and family, that's why they turn to immigration"...

<sup>34</sup> The method used consists of studying the statistical laws of vocabulary distribution in the corpus; thus, it reflects the relative importance of words compared to others as per their size; the size of the words is proportional to their frequency and the most quoted words are placed in the centre. A certain percentage of words are positioned vertically to make the graph easier and faster to understand.

<sup>35</sup> A dendrogram (from the ancient Greek dendron "tree", graph "engraver" → -gramma "small engraving") is a diagram frequently used to illustrate the arrangement of groups generated by a hierarchical or hierarchical grouping. This dendrogram was created from the Hierarchical Downward Classification 1 (HDC1).

<sup>36</sup> It was not scientifically possible to translate the body of text used to produce the word cloud from French into English without creating inconsistencies, so only the key words circled in colour were translated, as follows: *formation*: training; *étude*: study; *travail*: work; *emploi*: job; *vie*: life; *enfant*: child; *argent*: money; *jour*: day; *pirogue*: canoe; *entreprise*: business; *diplôme*: diploma or degree; *ami*: friend; *raison*: reason; *qualification*: qualification; *élève*: pupil; *connaissance*: knowledge. Every effort was made to choose the translation which most closely fits the original version in French. In case of a discrepancy, the French version prevails.

<sup>29</sup> The redundancy of lexical traces.

<sup>30</sup> This is a product under development at the Laboratory of Applied Studies and Research in Social Sciences of the University of Toulouse 3. This project is supported by the SMS labex "Structuring the social worlds".

<sup>31</sup> When the corpus is lemmatised, verbs are reduced to their infinitive form, nouns to singular and adjectives to masculine singular.

#### 4.1. The demands of family logic

At first sight, we are surprised by the prevalence of the term *family* and by its proximity to the term *child*; the latter does not refer to a person in the age of childhood but, rather, to a person aged 17 to 25 – stressing the importance of filial duties: “in our custom, if you reach a certain age, you are retired, you no longer have the means to support your family and it is your child who must provide for you”.

In the speeches collected, the family represents a group composed of mother, father and siblings. It is, at the same time, (1) a factor of emigration, synonymous with the “obligation” to “support”, “help” and “feed”, (2) an essential resource during the migratory journey, “to send a ransom and to be freed”, and (3) one of the objectives of the migration project – “to satisfy the needs of the family”, “to start a family” or “to be better considered by parents”.

However, the individual’s reference group can be extended to include other relatives<sup>37</sup> (e.g. “aunts”, co-wives of the “father” and their children), “neighbours” and “peers” (“friends”, “comrades”, “football partners”, etc.). This wider circle reflects the multiple forms of relationships which can influence the decision to migrate. “Geographical proximity helps to build social cohesion by facilitating exchanges and encounters”:<sup>38</sup> “when she came back from a *tontine*’s home<sup>39</sup> in the neighbourhood, my mother told me that our neighbour was wearing beautiful jewellery; her son is in Italy”.

Thus, under various influences, the family exerts “pressure”, in a more or less explicit manner, which “forces you to leave”: “we tell you: your friend, he left with the canoes, others left by road; indirectly, we are asking – *why not you?*” Thus, what “motivates the family to collect the money for departure is that there are neighbours here, and their sons are in Europe.”

The centrality of the term *family* in the word cloud reminds us that the social condition of these individuals (potential candidates for emigration) cannot be reduced to the condition of immigrants (or emigrants) which is assigned to them. **They are above all “children”, linked to their parents through close ties; these relationships of filiation, when applied to extended family and the entourage, play a central role in the emigration process.**

#### 4.2. Money, the cause and consequence of emigration

The size and location of the term money on the word cloud reflects its multiple meanings and the importance of its relationship to the term *family*.

Money motivates the choice to migrate or stay: “if I have money to stay and work here, I will stay; it is the lack of money and resources which causes us to leave”. Money, sent regularly or periodically, to the family by a relative – most often a brother or uncle who immigrated abroad – is also an incentive: “when you have your half-brother<sup>40</sup> who is in Europe and he helps his mother; every month he sends her money”; and, “if someone is sick or if there is a death, it is the one who is abroad who

<sup>37</sup> Bonvalet, C.; Lelièvre, E. 1995. “From the concept of household to that of the family circle: redefining the family space”, *Sociology and Society*, vol. XXVII, n° 2.

<sup>38</sup> Bonvalet, C. “The Local Family Circle” *Population*, vol. 58, n° 1, 2003, pg. 9–43.

<sup>39</sup> A widespread concept in Africa, “*tontine*” refers to an association of people, often women, who contribute to a common fund, the amount of which is given to each of them in turn.

<sup>40</sup> The son of the father’s co-wife.

solves the problem”, so “it makes you leave”. “Sometimes even, it’s the mothers, through the *tontines*, who provide us with the money to leave.”

When the decision is taken, money determines the mode of emigration: “Today, to leave legally for Europe you need FCFA 2,000,000,000 (about 3,000 euros); if you don’t have a brother (emigrant) who helps you leave, you leave illegally; that’s what forces the kids to go clandestinely, but if they had money to leave legally, they would do it.”

Then, on the “road”, it is difficult to “survive” and to “move forward” without money: “they were in a desert (...), they were captured and put in cages, in a hole in the ground; they gave a (telephone) number to ask their family for a ransom to free them; the sister was able, with the family (...), to collect a little money – FCFA300,000 (approximately 450 euros); they gave the money to someone at the post office (Western Union) and after three days, I think, the man called to say: *I am going to pass you your brother*; he said *I’m alive but the money sent is not enough* (...). After having sent money twice, I think, he was released; (...) he continued on his way and went to Spain”.

More generally, money is at the heart of the migratory project: it responds to a family commitment, “bringing money to my parents”, helps to make the objectives more concrete, “saving a little money to try to achieve my dream and to have my own workshop”, and promotes the sustainability of return, “those who leave do so in such a way that by collecting a little money there and by coming back, they can invest here and not return there”.

Like *family*, *money* supports different stages in emigration: it encourages departure; it guides the migratory process and contributes to the success of the migratory project.

#### 4.3. The vulnerability of the links between work and remuneration

The proximity of the term *work*, which at first glance is obviously simple – “money, what produces it is work” – actually questions the link between pay and work.

The speeches collected show that the remuneration received no longer corresponds to sufficient compensation for the work carried out. This observation is reinforced by the feeling that, for the same work or job, remuneration will depend on the place where the work is carried out (Senegal or abroad) rather than on the effort put in: “That’s the difference: those who are in Europe, they say that when they pick apples, they get FCFA800,000 (about 1,300 euros); those who work here, at the end of the month, they can’t even get FCFA50,000 (about 90 euros); so all anyone thinks about is going there to work and to earn money, because the incomes are not the same”.

The question of fair remuneration for work is becoming one of the major issues of emigration. The objective is to get out of “survival, from day-to-day life” and to “help people in the family, maybe (the) mother, people in the neighbourhood, and (even) close friends...” .

4.4. Problem, a term used with a singular frequency

The term *problem* is used with a singular frequency<sup>41</sup>; it reflects the importance of the links between *family* and *work*. Family and professional problems are interrelated; they do not exist separately, and are moments of a whole which contain both their origin and solution.

The sequence of problems, which are interconnected, fuels emigration:

- › the work carried out no longer leads to sufficient reward in cash;
- › this loss of remuneration deprives the family of basic resources;
- › the status of “children”, sons/daughters of parents, is weakened in siblings, relatives and the entourage.

Emigration offers solutions to these problems:

- › a suitable salary in return for the work carried out;
- › the possibility of sending money to provide decent living conditions for the family and to solve specific difficulties;
- › emigrants, sons/daughters of parents, are recognised in the network of related individuals (family and entourage).

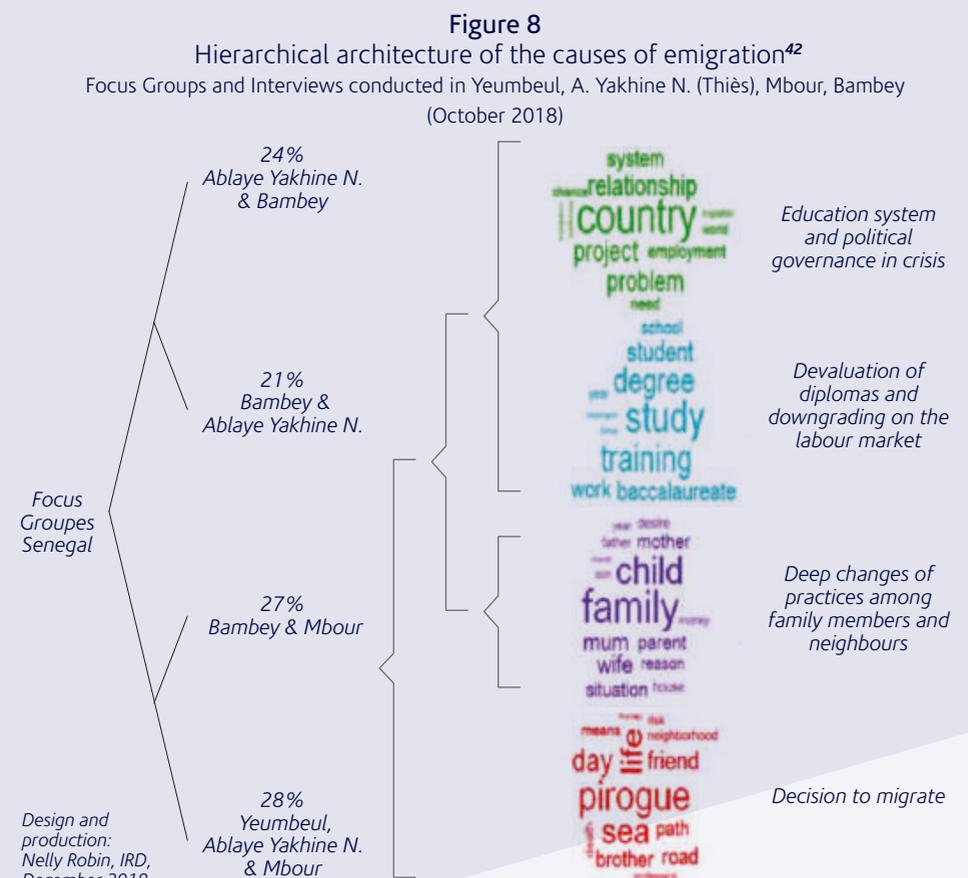
However, emigration, in turn, creates a new problem in the network of families, related by blood and/or by marriage: “Here, each child takes care of his mother. The son of the first lady (the father’s first wife) went to Europe; when he started sending money, he was better regarded than the others. So, the family forgets the one who stayed behind (in Senegal) who covers daily expenses and who does not have time to save money. He/she no longer exists in the family. That’s what makes you rebel and leave, even if you don’t want to”. These family inequalities, when applied to extended family, produce a set of causes and effects, and encourage the emigration of people who initially chose to remain in their country with the ambition of being actors in development.

Thus, the term *problem* reflects the plurality of difficulties experienced, and their economic and social consequences.

More generally, analysis of the discourse highlights that the links between work and remuneration are weak; this underlies the dynamics of collective protests/challenges. Linked to the development of new family logics, these form the basis for the desire for freedom, success and individual differentiation, which drives emigration today.

5. Relative frustration and inequality of opportunity

In order to deepen the analysis, the **dendrogram** offers a hierarchical and articulated classification of the universes of emigration. Figure 8 produces four hierarchical classes, each with a keyword: *country*, *study*, *family*, *canoe*.



<sup>41</sup> This is the word with the highest number of occurrences after the word family.

<sup>42</sup> Every effort has been made to choose the translation which corresponds most closely to the original version of the study (in French). However, it should be noted that in case of a discrepancy, the French original will prevail.

Based on the speeches collected, the causes of emigration are structured around four issues, represented – to a greater or lesser extent – by survey sites:

- › the governance of educational and political systems [Ablaye Yakhine N. (Thiès) and Bambej];
- › the devaluation of diplomas and downgrading on the labour market [Bambej and A. Yakhine N. (Thiès)];
- › deep changes in extended family and neighbourhood practices [Bambej and Mbour];
- › emigration and risk [Yeumbeul, A. Yakhine N. (Thiès) and Mbour].

The crisis in the governance of educational and political systems is leading to a devaluation of diplomas and a downgrading on the labour market. These developments accentuate inequalities, both social and economic, and crush the plans of young people who wish to be actors for development in their own countries. This loss of confidence in the effectiveness of public action and in the ethics of politics is expressed in both rural and urban areas. A young man from Bambej explains the flaws in the system and the injustices this causes one to feel: “You go to school for a long time, you get all your diplomas, you get your master’s degree or you are an engineer. Meanwhile, in your neighbourhood, there’s another person who used to spend all of his time sleeping, and overnight – because he got into politics – he now travels in a 4 x 4 and builds tall buildings. At the same time, you, with all your diplomas, at the end of the month, you’re chasing after a pathetic salary. Today, those with the highest salaries are not those who have studied”. A young man from Ablaye Yakhine N. confirms that “it is not surprising that young people risk their lives, try their luck in canoes; they know full well that they can stay here but they cannot imagine being in this poverty with all their diplomas. Here, if you have no financial means, you are insignificant – no one considers you, and that’s why people leave”.

In this context, “relative frustration and the individualisation of inequalities” can be retained as an interpretative script of the causes of emigration. As F. Dubet<sup>43</sup> points out, “the notion of relative frustration draws all its strength from a series of theoretical framings:

- › the first is of a psychological nature;
- › the second is that of democracy; it is Tocqueville who is the father of this theory, which considers that democratic passion mechanically generates relative frustration given that social equality is never guaranteed;
- › the third is that of collective action and social movements”.

Relative frustration is then declined along two main axes: the first is that of structural tensions constituted by the gap between expectations and resources; the second is that of social change when economic and political circumstances create tension between aspirations and the possibility to satisfy the latter.

This is what leads us to propose an analysis of the discourses in the light of the following two tensions:

- › one set of tensions, linked to the “social elevator” which has broken down, or at least is perceived to have done so;
- › others linked to a downgrading on the labour market, following a devaluation of diplomas.

This approach questions the weight of social immobility, exacerbated by a demand for social justice, understood as a demand for equalisation of opportunities in various fields, and particularly in those of employment and education.

### 5.1. Trajectories towards social advancement, at a standstill

The question of social advancement is raised by women and men, aged 25 to 39, who are breadwinners (most often) and have professional qualifications. They are, in particular:

- › craftsmen: electricians, in Thiès, building contractors or creators of a clothing brand in Yeumbeul (suburb of Dakar), metal workers, mechanics or pastry chefs in Mbour, among others;
- › fishing captains, too.

All are convinced of the quality of their skills and the opportunity and potential of their profession. However, they deplore:

- › the lack of recognition of their know-how and the work they do: “I am an electrician, but there is a very big difference between the way in which an electrician living in Senegal is considered and the way an electrician who is Senegalese and who lives in Europe is considered. Artisans working in Senegal are undervalued, compared to those in Europe. The other difference is the currency: between the Euro and the CFA, there is a very big gap. For example, I have work in Senegal, but an electrician in Europe can work on (the same type of) building sites but the money he will earn at one site like this is the money I earn here from three sites. That’s why I prefer to go to Europe rather than stay in Africa, because I have projects for my company but I don’t have money to invest in Senegal”. *Abdou (Ablaye Yakhine N.)*;
- › the difficulties encountered in improving their tools and in increasing their incomes: “If we fishermen had some support in our work, we wouldn’t need to want to go to Europe because today, with our job, we can earn more money than those in Europe. I take the example of the canoe called *‘fils à tourner’*<sup>44</sup>; if you have it for a year and if the job works out a bit, you can recover its purchase price and you will be able to help many people around you; (...) and yet there are many people who say that there is no money in fishing; I believe that fishing here in Africa is one of the most profitable professions, but we do not have enough resources and we do not have support”. *Pope (Mbour)*.

More generally, craftsmen and fishermen underline the under-exploitation of their human capital, which they attribute to:

- › the difficulty of saving money, because of the weight of domestic expenses related to family responsibilities;
- › loan conditions, which are ill-adapted to their situation and social context, particularly when they involve the mortgage of property (house, car, etc.);
- › difficulties in accessing public assistance;
- › unfair competition, linked to fishing rights and construction contracts awarded to foreign companies which are not obliged to hire local employees.

For all of these reasons, emigration is seen as a form of action aimed at acquiring:

- › an ability to save money through access to higher incomes (for equal work) and taking “distance” from daily family obligations:
  - Sam (woodcarver): “What makes people want to go on an adventure is that it’s easier to save abroad than it is here”;
  - Fallou (metal worker): “The person who is not here has time to save money and is well-regarded; the family does not realise that the one who is here does not have time to save because of the family”.

<sup>43</sup> Dubet, F. “Relative deprivation and individualisation of inequalities”, *Revue de l’OFCE*, vol. 150, n° 1, 2017, pg. 1126.

<sup>44</sup> This is a large model pirogue, which allows you to stay several days at sea.

- › recognised professional experience:
  - Balla (electrician): “I saw an electrician who lived in Europe for years; he came back to Senegal, he has his own company and he makes a lot of money. We recognise his experience simply because he went *there*”.

Compared to their parents, the people interviewed in the focus groups testify to a deteriorating situation; according to them, opportunities for social advancement are becoming increasingly scarce for the populations of the working classes. Emigration then appears as an alternative to the social immobility to which they think they are assigned if they remain in their country of origin.

## 5.2. Devaluation of diplomas and downgrading on the labour market

At the same time, the discourse of graduates, from the baccalaureate to higher education (master/engineer), is unambiguous; they denounce the devaluation of diplomas that leads to a downgrading on the labour market. These are women and men, aged 25 to 35, most of them single due to a lack of resources to qualify for marriage.

For these young people, only one question is asked: “Young people have never held so many diplomas; do they fair better professionally as a result?” This question, which was central to the debates during the focus groups, invites other questions:

- › to what extent has “educational *massification*” been successful in terms of social mobility?
- › how far has the diploma lost value, as it has become more widespread, in the face of a highly-skilled job market which is not evolving at the same pace?<sup>45</sup>

These questions are not isolated; they echo the words of Marc-François Mignot-Mahon, President of Galileo Global Education, who calls for “getting out of a model that is going in circles without integrating newcomers into a labour market which is too narrow” (Dakar, November 2018)<sup>46</sup>.

In this context, for obvious reasons, the words of young graduates, met during the focus groups, express a double aspiration:

- › that there is a relation between diplomas (knowledge and mastery of know-how) and remuneration;
- › that beyond the professional sphere, the diploma confers a social status.

However, everyone feels that today “diplomas are no longer a reliable passport to employment” and are no longer “the leading indicator of merit”.

They attribute this:

- › to companies which give priority to a wage saving logic over diplomas, leading to under-qualification of staff whose recruitment criteria remain relatively obscure;
- › to the “business complex” which weakens the “exchange value” of national public diplomas on the labour market: with the same degree, employment prospects differ according to whether or not you have completed at least partially your university course abroad and/or whether or not you have professional experience abroad (Europe, Canada, USA, mainly).

For these young people, the key challenge is therefore real equality of access to recognised diplomas. However, this often seems to be hampered both by a problematic blurring between public training and private or foreign qualifications, and by opportunities closely linked to relational networks.

The observation is bitter; the discourse of young people shows:

- › that they are torn between the hope of recognition of their diplomas and repeated disappointments: “I presented my CV to two large companies; one in Dakar, the other in St. Louis. The two Directors of Human Resources (DRH) asked me the same question: *do you know someone who works here?* I answered, no. The same advice was given to me: take your CV back. Don’t waste your time and don’t make me waste mine” (young graduate in mechanical engineering);
- › their bitterness in the face of persistent social relegation; considered as “useless”, “idle” and “a burden” by their family and entourage; “they do not need someone who has knowledge; scientists are no longer respected. Today, ministers are appointed only as a result of their political potential, not for their intellectual knowledge”.
- › the uncertainty and anguish of not knowing for how long their life project will remain at a standstill: “Today a teacher cannot even build a house, he must take out a loan, whilst someone who goes abroad returns to build a building next to the teacher’s house”.

Emigration is therefore conceived as a “compensatory strategy”, even if it implies “in the country of immigration, having to downgrade oneself on the labour market more than in Senegal”, and the use of illegal channels: “every person who leaves Senegal or Africa would have preferred to leave via legal channels through which you will not encounter any problems; but if you see that our comrades and young brothers take dangerous roads, it is because they have no choice; we see here many people who have their diplomas and everything, to whom visas are refused, but in this case, they seek other solutions in order to leave” (young graduate master in political science).

Thus, graduates highlight the complexity of their situations, the power relations which underlie them, and the economic and social processes that shape them and encourage emigration.

More generally, according to the interviews carried out, several paths can lead to an increase in inequalities: insufficient public action in the educational sphere, loss of ethics in the political system and lack of transparency in the way private companies are managed. In the end, three main elements seem to determine the level of inequality, which explains the choice of emigration: the governance of public policies, access to training, the right to work and apply for employment. Implicitly, the State is being asked to make greater efforts to improve its legitimacy and capacity to meet the basic needs of its population. Without this, the people we met are convinced that inequalities will explode and that emigration will not decrease. As H. Bréant, S. Chauvin, and A. Portilla remind us, “migration projects are almost never thought of as ends in themselves, and overwhelmingly pose migration as a means of maintaining or improving one’s social status and that of one’s family, not in the ‘host’ country but in the country of origin”<sup>47</sup>.

Thus, before being presented as “a solution to poverty”, emigration is presented as an alternative to social immobility and a reaction to inequality of opportunity, for which the State is primarily deemed to be responsible. According to the interviewees, only profound political changes can reduce social inequalities in the long term – these cannot be reduced to economic capital alone – and can influence the mechanisms which encourage people to migrate.

<sup>45</sup> P. Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron pointed out, as early as 1964 that the rapid increase in the number of people holding academic qualifications compared to the number of positions to which these qualifications normally give access, leads to a devaluation of diplomas.

<sup>46</sup> Debate on “Changes in higher education”, organised by Le Monde Afrique, in Dakar, on 22nd and 23rd November 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Bréant Hugo, Sébastien Chauvin, and Ana Portilla. “Social capital and the challenges of international migration”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, vol. 225, n° 5, 2018, pg. 9.

Emigration is therefore the result of cumulative elements; we can no longer understand the decision to emigrate using the “usual” criteria. The process must be analysed in a different way. Economic and political criteria alone are insufficient; extended family and neighbourhood relations have become a fertile entry point for studying the causes of emigration.

### 5.3. Extended family relationships, an ambiguous issue

The departure of a younger child, before any other family member, questions the usual logic of emigration: to what extent can this new configuration undermine family patterns? Does this lead to a renegotiation of the social position of new migrants within the family and the entourage?<sup>48</sup>

#### 5.3.1. Birth right called into question by the youngest child’s emigration

To answer these questions, we need to understand how, today, social organisation and social relations in the country of departure are marked by the emigration of one of the younger children, and how this is a new development.

In a Senegalese family, within the same generation, authority belongs first and foremost to the eldest children. Current emigration – often initiated by a younger child having dropped out of school at an early age – throws into doubt these principles of the extended family system and the network of families linked to it.

The decision to migrate has been individualised. It is no longer thought of as a process of transmission along the bloodline; it means that the right of the eldest child is replaced by the right of personal initiative, stimulated by the responsibilities which everyone considers they have towards their parents and towards the family economy.

This transformation of migratory logic deprives the eldest child of his authority; he is gradually excluded from the management of family activities, as the younger one redistributes the “fruits” of his/her emigration: “even if you are the eldest child, you no longer exist in the family if your little brother is abroad”.

It is therefore precisely through emigration that new relationships between individuals take root and meaning, this is no longer according to the genealogical position which individuals occupy within the family but, rather, to their choice to emigrate or not. The place in the family is no longer determined by the rules of birth right, but by the redistribution of resources linked to emigration.

The family becomes a source of tension between elder and younger children, extended to other relatives if children of the same father have different mothers. In this case, the links with the mother’s clan take precedence: “For example, you are in a polygamous family, the children of one of the two wives have done better than the others; they take good care of their mother whilst the children of the other wife do not have the means to do this; they will seek by all means to succeed and to provide for their mother, including risking their lives in canoes or going through Libya to Europe. Because they want to save their mother’s honour in the house and in the neighbourhood.”

<sup>48</sup> The concept of family and friends is intended here to broaden the individual’s reference group by taking into account parents, non-co-resident children, spouses and siblings as well as all persons with whom the individual has co-resided at some point in his or her life (Bonvalet and Lelièvre, 1995; Lelièvre et al., 1997).

Thus, the stakes of emigration seem to be more and more polarised around the question of the social recognition of the “mother”: “I am in the house with my half-brothers and sisters, their mother lives very comfortably in the house (since her son is abroad)<sup>49</sup>, while we become very small in the house. This shame, I cannot endure it; I am ready to take any risks to leave”. Between the “mother” and the son, a mutually-supporting relationship is created; sons leave so that they can “help their mother”, often without the knowledge of the latter; during the migration journey, they “call their mother before crossing (the Mediterranean) because the mother’s blessing is sacred. If your mother gives you her blessing for everything, you start and you succeed; it is imperative that you have your mother’s blessing so that you can continue your journey”.

Today, it is undeniable that the family and the migrant have an ambivalent relationship: the family encourages departure, accompanies the migration process from a distance and can provide support in difficult times. In return, the family expects a lot from the migrant who, because of his/her often precarious economic and administrative situation in the host country, seeks protection from the family making multiple requests of him/her. Nevertheless, mere arrival in Europe confers on him/her, de facto, a status which, according to his/her genealogical position among his/her siblings, can redefine the moral and social order of the family. Thus, paradoxically, emigration can both strengthen the family’s social position and threaten the cohesion between family members.

#### 5.3.2. Neighbourhood relationships and “social burden”

A neighbourhood is another social construction which includes a notion of community, associated with a sense of local belonging and friendship. The neighbourhood is an important aspect of Senegalese social interaction, which influences the decision to emigrate: “For 80% of young people who leave, it is the social weight. In the neighbourhood, they have a friend, and one day they see their friend go to Italy or France, and as soon as he returns they see that he marries a beautiful girl, he has a house, he has a stable life: that’s an explanation, it’s a cause that drives people to go abroad”.

The relationship between neighbours works like a mirror; we compare and evaluate each other. Within these complex relationships between residents of the same neighbourhood, the groups of tontines run by women occupy a central place. According to the rules established when they were set up, members visit each other in turn at different intervals, often monthly. The tontine gives the opportunity to meet, discuss and exchange: it is based on the pooling of a certain amount of money which will go to the hostess. At each meeting, each woman is dressed in her finest clothes; it is a perfect opportunity to display the clothes and jewellery acquired thanks to the money sent by her son or husband who has emigrated. The great events of life – marriage, baptism, death – are also privileged moments to display the “success” achieved by the son or husband: “You are in the living room; your mother comes back from a ceremony in the neighbourhood and points out to you that the mother of your friend who is in Spain impressed everyone with her magnificent boubou and gold jewellery. You know, she tells you that she would be proud of you if you also had the courage to emigrate; it’s hard for a son to hear; you’re not going to live until you find a way to leave”.

Neighbourhood relationships, in their various forms, are thus marked by logics of differentiation and jealousy, which create unspoken competition and which encourage emigration in order to gain recognition for oneself and one’s family.

<sup>49</sup> She is the co-wife of the father and his children.

These developments among siblings, relatives and neighbours show that emigration does not eliminate inequalities, but rather it transforms them, because it transforms hierarchies; it causes a disruption of family relations and a change in the social organisation of the society of origin. This double observation raises two essential questions:

- › does current emigration lead to a redefinition of family and social hierarchies?
- › does the emigration of some add new inequalities to the daily life and local space of others?

In this context, by considering the meanings given to emigration, we obtain both an explanation and an understanding of its causes.

**Current emigration takes on its full meaning in relation to social immobility, to extended family and to neighbourhood relations; it replaces this impasse and these tensions with economic prosperity and social recognition; it is these “values” which provide emigration with such significance that it becomes legitimate to risk one’s life (or to let one’s child risk his/her own life).**

Thus, emigration draws its strength from a system of circular causality (Morin, 1990): the devaluation of diplomas and its corollary – downgrading in the labour market – lead to social immobility, which in turn leads to a deep distrust of the economic and political governance of the country of origin, and leads to emigration; this leads to a reconstitution of extended family and neighbourhood relations which, in turn, broadens the spectrum of potential emigrants in the family circle and entourage. Therefore, not engaging in an emigration process appears to equate to indifference vis-à-vis one’s own family. A young person, who tries to explain his choice not to emigrate is often mocked, whereas the one who migrates, whatever the result, is appreciated: “It is already a source of pride to say that your son is in Europe. The family thinks that its situation will change in so many years or months, unlike the one who stays behind – he can spend so much money on daily expenses and the family no longer sees it”.

**Thus, emigration has a dual meaning: to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of one’s family, friends and neighbours, and thereby to earn the esteem of one’s peers (or to avoid social misjudgement by one’s peer group). Implicitly, emigration becomes a social requirement.**

## 6. Emigration, a long and complex process

In this context, Senegal’s long migration history, on which the imagination of a collective identity is based, underpins current emigration processes and explains, in part, that known risks are overcome: “there are many risks, many boys die during the journey”; “canoes are a great risk, you leave the whole family, it is like a form of suicide”. One of the focus group participants told the story of a young man from Yeumbeul: “He was a child<sup>50</sup> when he told me he was going to go to the canoes, I forbade him to do so; two months later, he called me to tell me that he was in Turkey and that he was taking a boat; I was worried; for two days we had no news from him; then the person with whom he was travelling told us that he had died”. (But), “we Senegalese are migrants”.

Current emigration can be understood according to an “integrated” approach, considered as a process, modelled as follows (Figure 9): departure, i.e. *realisation* is preceded by two preliminary phases, *collective intention* and *individualised decision*, both influenced by a variety of social, economic and political factors.

The **intention to emigrate** expresses the refusal of social immobility, exacerbated by a demand for social justice, understood as a demand for equalisation of opportunities, particularly in the fields of education and employment. This collective intention then becomes individualised and becomes a **decision** based on the tension between personal aspirations and the possibility to satisfy the latter, which reflect the way the individual thinks of himself within his family network and his wider entourage. The individualisation of inequalities leads to an act of putting into effect – the realisation – of emigration, according to the capacities of autonomy and the opportunities of each individual.

In order to understand the transition from collective intention to individual action, it is necessary to unravel the elementary facts of this decision and to evaluate how each element matures: the refusal of social immobility, the experience of relative frustration and the realisation of an individualisation of inequalities. These are all gradual changes which lead to the overcoming of intention and the realisation of emigration.

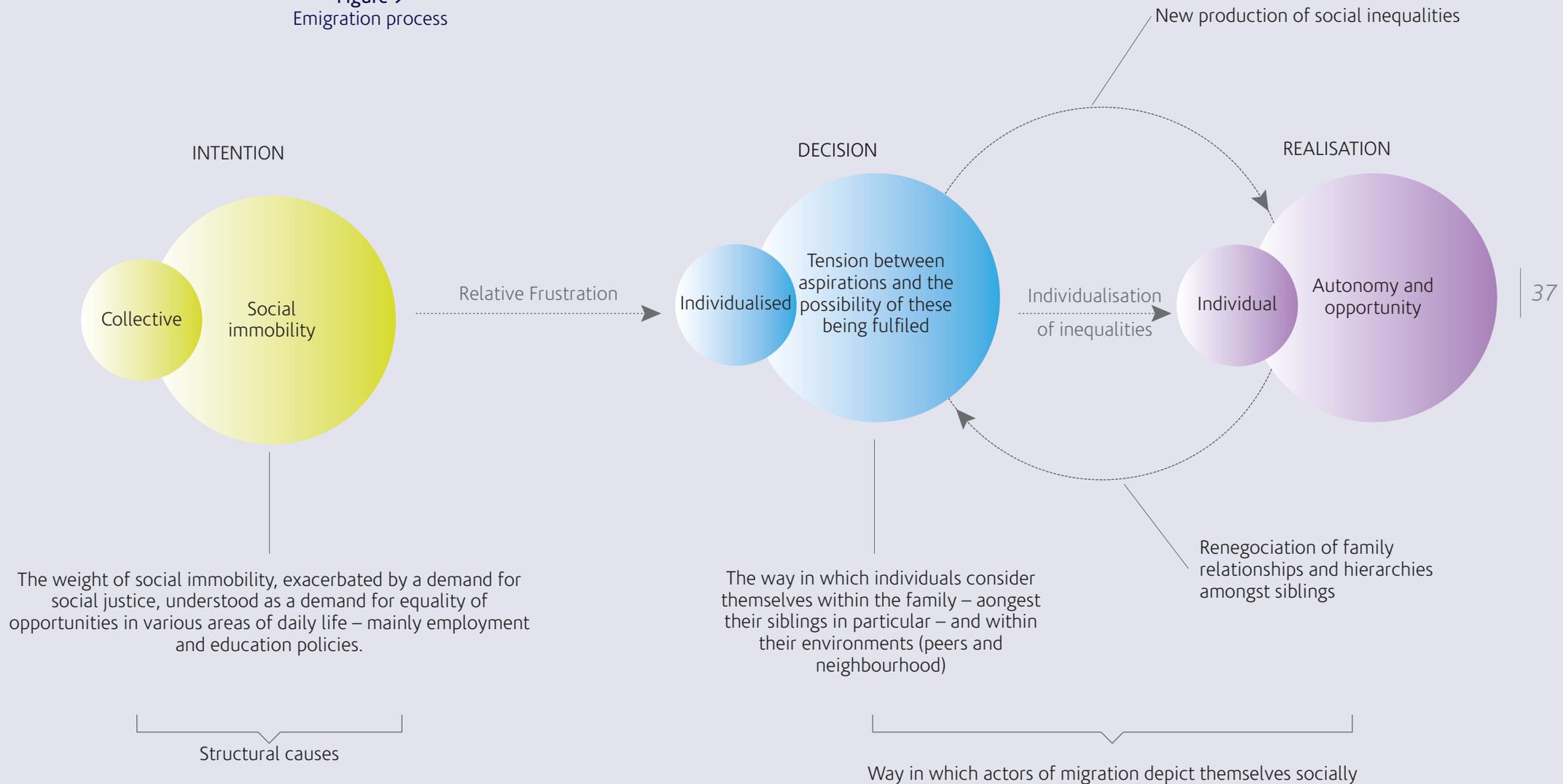
The individualised decision constitutes a transition – initiated long before as part of a collective intention – which ends up imposing itself as an individual metamorphosis (“we would never have imagined that he would leave”), after a long and uncertain process. Thus, emigration is a sum of elements which can only be perceived as an irreversible movement in retrospect.

<sup>50</sup> The term “child” refers to young people between the ages of about 17 and 25.

In other words, the question of emigration cannot be explained as a linear process, a simple evolution; it is important not to omit discontinuities, gaps and breaks; the prospective emigrant experiences the precariousness and uncertainty of migration before embarking on the multiple paths of the migratory journey – this constitutes a key segment of the migration project.

Today, therefore, the carrying out – *realisation* – of emigration remains something uncertain and, in order to understand this, we cannot dissociate this from the migratory journey.

**Figure 9**  
Emigration process



## Conclusion

This new type of emigration transcends the usual dynamics of Senegalese emigration, which is based either on a transnational family system (migration from the Senegal River region) or on a diasporic organisation (migration of the Mouride community). It is more urban than rural, transgenerational and includes minors. In addition, the poorest social classes also participate. This change is linked to the mobilisation of new resources: money from the mother's tontine and informal work carried out along the migratory route. Paradoxically, the precarious conditions of emigration offer new opportunities to a population which could not previously gather sufficient resources for departure and travel.

Hence, emigration can be seen as the consequence of social and cultural changes, which individualise inequalities and increase frustration due to an infinite set of comparisons. The "usual" social hierarchies are being undermined by new modes of representation.

This combination of social and political mechanisms and individual experiences contributes to the decision to migrate and to the individualisation of departure: "it is injustice, honour and courage that makes people leave, but it is reason that makes people come back"; "the money I seek is not for me but for the future of my children".

Current emigration is above all an expression of **social anger** that cannot be expressed in political action and social movements. This anger, linked both to the emotions and to the social function of the individual, must be understood as an aspiration for a fairer society that is concerned not only with organising the redistribution of goods between individuals, but also with promoting and guaranteeing an environment in which individuals find a way to achieve their full potential and be recognised in their concrete, professional and family lives<sup>51</sup>.

Today, it is therefore less the inequalities between the South and North, but the inequality of opportunities in the country of origin that explains emigration. It is emerging as the alternative to immobility and social injustice. However, it is still difficult for decision-makers to imagine emigration in this way, which breaks with the usual push-pull theory (economic and demographic) between countries of origin and destination. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that this issue becomes a major one for the economic and political governance of countries of origin.

<sup>51</sup> Rawls J., 1971 (1997 edition). *A Theory of justice. Threshold, Points, Tests*, 666 pg.

## List of figures

Figure 1	
Migration exchanges between African countries in the Rabat process. Situation in 2017.....	10
Figure 2	
International emigrants by sub-regional destination, Senegal, 2013.....	17
Figure 3	
French literacy rate by department and age group, Senegal, 2013.....	17
Figure 4	
Unemployment rate by age group and department, Senegal, 2013.....	18
Figure 5	
International emigrants by country of destination, Senegal, 2013.....	18
Figure 6	
Evolution of Senegalese immigration to Italy and Spain between 2008 and 2017.....	19
Figure 7	
Word cloud – Focus Groups and Interviews conducted in Yeumbeul, A. Yakhine N. (Thiès), Mbour, Bambeby .....	23
Figure 8	
Hierarchical architecture of the causes of emigration – Focus Groups and Interviews conducted in Yeumbeul, A. Yakhine N. (Thiès), Mbour, Bambeby ...	27
Figure 9	
Emigration process .....	36–37

# Social immobility VERSUS social mobility

STUDY CARRIED OUT BY NELLY ROBIN  
FOR THE ICMPD



**Rabat Process**  
Euro-African Dialogue  
on Migration and Development

Project funded by the  
European Union



Project implemented by

