

# SMALL TOWN TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE SENEGAL RIVER VALLEY

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All across the Senegal River Valley rural towns are supported by male labor migrants who have left their families and traveled abroad to work. Large homes, small businesses, and commercial vehicles attest to individuals' successful accumulation of wealth from abroad. But more than this, almost every commodity from cattle to canned peas, almost every form of investment is influenced by the central role that migrant remittances play in the local economy. At the same time, the ways that people relate to one another across the community are mediated by migration-based distinctions. But beyond economics the worldviews that people express and their expectations for the future are heavily influenced by migrants' stories and personal connections with friends and family who now live and work abroad.

My research focuses on the economic and social aspects of life in this region. From August 2015 through August 2016 I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork. I first spent 10 months in a rural Wolof town that typified the culture of migration which is seen throughout the Senegal River Valley. Then I spent the next 2 months between Paris and northern Italy



visiting many of the migrant men whom I had previously met during their trips to their hometown in Senegal. This itinerary shaped my field of investigation and helped me to gain access and insight into a fragmented set of migrant destinations all connected to one migrant-sending town.

My research questions focused on the ways that people negotiate family finances and social dynamics in this transnational context. I studied the local economy in the Senegal River Valley; the ways that remittances are spent and how this influx of cash has created a new range of economic horizons for some while other money-making possibilities have dried up. I looked at the ways that migrant experiences are interpreted in the small town context and the ways that people are adapting to changing circumstances and opportunities both at home and abroad.

All together this research has shown me how, at least in the case of one particular community, economic migration has come to shape the lives of everyone, migrants and non-migrants alike bound together in one community, one transnational small town.

Overall, as I write up my research results my hope is that my work

will contribute some fresh insights to the growing field of knowledge on the transnational movements and connections of people across the world today.

Portions of my research were funded by the Fulbright-Hays Fellowship, the University of Florida Graduate School, the Sahel Research Group, and the Doughty Award from the Department of Anthropology.

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