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Dire la violence des frontières. Mises en mots de la migration vers l'Europe

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# The Discursive Spaces of the Border: Putting Death and Arbitrariness during the Journey to Europe into Words

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- 1 In a world that is both globalized and deeply fragmented, the forms taken by contemporary borders are being rethought. Several recent studies on international migrations have manifested a strong interest in the concepts of border, boundary (De Genova, 2005), borderland (Bliber, 2003; Agier, 2016), borderities (Amilhat Szary and Giraut, 2015), borderscape (Rajaram and Grundy Warr, 2008; Brambilla, 2014) or border(land)scape (Xavier Ferrer-Gallardo, Abdel Albet-Mas, Keina Espineica, 2016). These concepts are mobilized in scholarship that focuses on the effects of migration policies on the production of new border spaces – enclosed spaces (whose archetypes are detention centres),<sup>1</sup> informal camps, urban fringes or more broadly, vast territories criss-crossed by both visible and invisible borders, where confinement happens out in the open. Where French uses the word *frontière*, which is etymologically derived from ‘front’ (Foucher, 1991), English has two main terms: ‘border’ reflects a geographical and territorial approach and refers to a demarcation between spaces, whereas ‘boundary’ tends to refer to social and symbolic borders, creating an us vs. them distinction. In his study on the functioning of the detention centres on the Italian island of Lampedusa, Tassin (2013) proposes to consider border and boundary jointly<sup>2</sup> for a better understanding of how the control of undesirable populations both draws on and

further encourages processes of categorization of individuals and places. In the field of international migrations, Agier (2014) uses the term 'borderland', adopting an ethnographic approach wherein the local and the global are studied hand in hand on a globalized scale<sup>3</sup> to yield insights into the multiplication and density of 'border situations'.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on Foucault's work on governmentality and power, Amilhat Szary and Giraut (2015) suggest the term 'borderities' to 'better express the individual and collective dimensions of what is at stake in the relationship to international limits and their crossings' (Amilhat Szary, 2015: 108) while accounting for the point of view of those who cross borders or attempt to do so. Proposed by Rajaram and Grundy Warr (2008), the concept of 'borderscape' was taken up by Brambilla (2014) to address the de-territorialized, scattered and mobile nature of contemporary borders as well as their performative aspects. The author applies the concept to a new geography of borders between Libya and Italy, approached in terms of oasis-scapes, camp-scapes and business-scapes.

- 2 Regardless of their nuances,<sup>5</sup> these concepts invite us to describe and analyse a specific form of governance of migrations and its implications on the migrants' lived spaces (Pian, 2016):<sup>6</sup> these spaces are experienced and represented, but also narrativized. This paper examines borders primarily through the lens of the discourses formulated on the experience of crossing (or attempting to cross). These experiences of the border, which generate discursive practices, can be seen as points of tension between 'nonindexical borders' and 'indexical borders' - (Green, 2012): the former term refers to borders materialized by control systems, and the second considers them as indexical places whose meaning depends on a given context, on one's vantage point and on where discourse is coming from.
- 3 In this context, drawing on a variety of fieldworks conducted with migrants on an illegal journey to Europe (Pian 2009a, 2010, 2016), this paper examines the making of discourses on death and on violence *at* the borders and *by* the borders. Specific attention will be devoted to how what is perceived as institutional arbitrariness is put into words.<sup>7</sup> The term 'arbitrary' has two common meanings: 'based on random choice or personal whim, rather than any reason or system' and 'unrestrained and autocratic in the use of authority' (according to the New Oxford American Dictionary). From a sociological perspective, arbitrariness cannot be dissociated from broader relations of power and domination. Raising the question of the differential implementations of law, it translates in the 'management of illegalisms' (Fischer and Spire, 2009), the result of the 'discretionary power [of] the agents [...] mandated by the State to take decisions that may have a life-changing impact on the subjects in front of them'. This power, the authors note, draws on a 'repertoire of actions ranging from sanction to transaction, and which cannot be reduced to the autonomous manifestation of State power' (*Ibid.*). Here I will not so much focus on the violence of practices at the borders, as in the recent issue of *Culture et Conflits* (2015), but rather, in a complementary fashion, turn to the discourses they elicit in the migrants, whether these are conveyed to researchers (who are in an outsider's position as they conduct investigations by familiarization) or to the peer group.
- 4 This paper draws on analysis of secondary data, the 'leftovers' (Beaud and Weber, 2003) of ethnographic study. These data were collected over the course of fieldworks (which combined observations, informal discussions and recorded interviews) conducted in 2008 in Senegal and between 2003 and 2009 in Morocco.<sup>8</sup> The fieldwork in Senegal

focused on migrants who were turned away after crossing into the Canary Islands (having stayed in a detention centre until they were turned away). I met them in Dakar, Mbour and Cayar, in everyday life settings (at work, in their neighbourhoods or family home, etc.). The fieldwork in Morocco mainly took place in three cities and their peripheries (Casablanca, Rabat and Fes), with Senegalese migrants seeking to get to Europe.<sup>9</sup> These are multi-site fieldworks in terms of location, but also in terms of trajectory stages.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, I met interviewees on several occasions in various Moroccan cities but also in their country of origin after they had returned (having been repatriated or through another route). I collected testimonies of migrants<sup>11</sup> on their experiences of migration, and by extension on their experiences of the outer borders of Europe and the institutional actors that embody them. In a discussion of the etymology of the French word for witness, *témoignage*, Fassin (2010) recalled the term's two Latin roots. The first, *superstes*, refers to someone who has witnessed and survived an event, where the second, *testis*, refers to the outside observer of a scene, who has witnessed it but not personally experienced it. Here, the discourse of migrants as *superstes* is discussed.

- 5 The paper is divided into two sections. The first identifies different registers of discourses on death, which refer to physical death in the literal sense and social death in the figurative sense. The second section looks at how the experience of the opaque management of migrations – particularly in detention centres – fuels certain rumours, which can be studied as ‘social facts’ (Bonhomme, 2009) illuminating, among other things, a distinctive relationship to the institutions.

## From slogan to experience

- 6 The slogan *Barça wala Barsakh* (Barcelona or death/the great beyond in Wolof), brandished by many Senegalese who attempted to reach the Canary Islands from the Senegalese coast in 2006-2008 (or who claimed they were ready to try), shows that the reference to death is present<sup>12</sup> in the discourses of the migrants who choose to cross illegally. In the year 2006 alone, 31,000 people made it to the Canary Islands on a dugout canoe. A few thousand died or went missing at sea; no precise count is available but the traces of these deaths are very much palpable in the places where a lot of people have left.<sup>13</sup> A fisherman I met in Mbour in 2008, who had been turned away from the Canary Islands, told me: ‘They say that those who died as illegals at sea are at least as many people as there are in the Jola’.<sup>14</sup> The discourses that touch on death or the threat of death in these journeys to Europe are however characterized by significant nuances, depending on whether they aim at legitimating, justifying or even rationalizing emigration, at conveying extreme experiences of dealing with natural barriers, or at describing the forms of institutional violence experienced during the journey.

## Social death vs. physical death

- 7 On a first, discursive level, the phrase *Barça wala Barsakh* has been heralded as an emblem of the determination to challenge the borders of Europe. What is at stake in this challenge is to gain a social existence, in the context of a life that is considered worthless. As Malik (student, 20, father fisherman), who comes from a suburb of Dakar, puts it: ‘I didn’t leave to leave; I left so that I wouldn’t stay.’<sup>15</sup> Here, the risk taken by opting to cross on a dugout canoe is presented as a means to fight, to refuse social death. The

latter encompasses the lack of consideration from friends and loved ones, the inability to perform one's duty, to contribute financially to family life – in short, to exist socially (Timera, 2001; Pian, 2011a), against the backdrop of the economic crisis and of broader transformations of family relationships in Senegal.

- 8 Risking or even losing's one life means *'going into action'* and show everyone that one is *'capable'*, to quote the words used by this young Senegalese man.<sup>16</sup> Physical death, if it must come, is seen as a means to gain *post-mortum* social recognition. These challenges to death and life are described using religion-tinged metaphors: the word *'Sirat'* often comes up in reference to the dangerous sea currents off the Moroccan coast, and by extension to the fateful trial they have to go through to finally reach the Canary Islands. In the words of an unemployed twenty-something son of a fisherman, who was turned away from the Canary Islands: *'At that time, the illegals became artists. You know, in the Quran, they say that to go to Paradise, you need to take a path that they call the Sirat. We call it the Sirat. The Quran says you have to walk on a very thin wire to cross. So the illegals call the crossing the Sirat, and the Senegal the world of problems, and Europe is Paradise, and to get there you need to cross the Sirat. Sirat is the route from Morocco where all the illegals start to panic because it gets rougher...'* This allegory refers to the crossing of the bridge on the Day of Judgment. In the Quran, the bridge is described as *'sharper than a sword'* and *'thinner than a hair'*. Non-Muslims will find themselves unable to cross the bridge and fall down into Hell; sinning Muslims will first slip into Hell, and then be able to get to Paradise after a punishment. This example shows how, in the face of the threat of death that is inherent in the illegal crossing, a whole universe of signs and symbols is conjured,<sup>17</sup> drawing both on the religious register and on representations of Europe: here, Europe is a paradise whose road is paved with obstacles and requires crossing a dangerous border between two worlds. The crossing of this border is depicted as a trial, with its glorious, fallen and/or missing heroes.
- 9 However, this assertiveness and defiance in the face of a death that is not feared crumbles when confrontation to physical death is no longer *virtual*, but *imminent*. This does not mean that some of the discourses being conveyed to the researcher are truer than others. That being said, while discourses are always framed<sup>18</sup> by the context of their production and the other people present, this framing also depends on the timing and focus of the narrative. Discourses that make some room for the apprehension of death emerged when my interviewees retrospectively evoked the sinking of their boat and/or the rough conditions of the crossing (having to cope with heat or rain, with a tarp for shelter at best; dealing with the lack of water and food; realizing with dread that the canoe is starting to crack apart, watching fellow crossers become delirious, etc.). This is exemplified by the account of a 38-year-old man from Mbour, who has been working as a fisherman since he was young, like his father and grandparents before him: *'The boat had a leak; we had to bail water out. People no longer wanted to wear life jackets, they'd say that dying at sea after 10 or 40 minutes is the same thing'*. Likewise, Mbalo (30), who worked as a day labourer on construction sites before leaving, told me about some of his companions of misfortune who were in the same boat as him: *'Before they could see their death, they threw themselves into the water to be at peace'*. Watching helplessly as fellow travellers die by jumping overboard is also recounted as a particularly trying ordeal: *'it's horrible, you can see that you're nothing and you ask yourself what life is... You're nothing, you die just like that, maybe your body will be found on a beach, nameless...'* (Sy, mechanic, tried to get to the Canary Islands through Morocco).

- 10 These words express a feeling of powerlessness tinged with *fatalism* (putting on a life jacket is useless) and *nihilism* (life no longer seems to have a meaning). Yet, the experience of dealing with natural forces is not the only one that invites migrants to nuance the slogan *Barça wala Barsakh*; in a complementary register,<sup>19</sup> the experience of discretionary power also does.

### A discretionary power of life and death

- 11 References to death often occur when interviewees discuss how, at a specific point in their experience of migration, they came face to face with State agents (soldiers, border guards, policemen, etc.) or 'border professionals' (Lask, 1995) who embody State order and who, in a single gesture, a single decision, a single word, can keep them standing at the border of life or cast them away.
- 12 Amadou, who was repatriated to Senegal in the wake of the incidents that took place in Ceuta and Melilla, went through one of these experiences. Amadou travelled to Morocco in 2001 in the hope of eventually reaching Spain but turned to street vending in Casablanca. In 2005, as he was selling his wares in the streets of the Medina, he was arrested by Moroccan police during a large-scale raid and deported to the Algerian border. He was among those migrants who wandered for days across the desert no man's land between Morocco and Algeria before the Moroccan and Algerian authorities responded to the international outcry by eventually going into the desert to fetch the migrants they had deported and organize their repatriation to their countries of origin. As Agier (2013: 68) contended in reference to Clara Lecadet's studies on Malian deportees (2012), deportation 'makes the border exist through its outer part' and introduces a selection between those who are authorized to live 'inside' the border and those who are not. For the deportees, the violence of the process is made worse by its implementation. Amadou, when I met him in Senegal several months after his repatriation from Morocco, described his deportation in the following terms: '*They brought us to Fes; there, they crammed other people into the bus and they took us to Oujda (...). A truck drove us into the desert. Nobody rebelled. The policemen were armed, and if you did anything, they could kill you right there and then, like a drop of water, without nobody knowing*'. After wandering in the desert for days, turned away in succession by Algerian and Moroccan border guards, Amadou ended up reaching a small village in the East of Morocco with a small group of fellow travellers. Exhausted and dehydrated, they asked locals for bread and water when a police patrol arrived. According to Amadou, this is what they told them: '*better you kill us right here instead of leaving us to die a slow death (...). Why did you throw us into the desert? If you don't want us, you have to return us home but don't do this to us. We're men, we have a family, we're not animals*'.
- 13 This account conveyed to the researcher expresses several relationships to the institutional order. The claim to a negated humanity ('*We're men*') is contrasted with the treatment he faced, equating him with a 'homo sacer', a man who only has his 'bare life' left (Agamben, 1997) in the face of authorities that wield a power of life and death over him.<sup>20</sup> His words reflect a gap between what the State does to the bodies ('*crammed*', reduced to a '*drop of water*' or an '*animal*') and what he is, what he considers himself to be. Furthermore, here power is wielded in a setting where Amadou is anonymous. His discourse conveys a vision of dying where no one will notice, and of a death sentence given with total impunity by State agents who will not face any repercussions ('*they*

*could kill you right there and then (...) without nobody knowing*'). These narratives describe the experience of 'infra-law' areas (Lochak, 1985). Lochak made a distinction between two types of law – one objective and the other subjective, supposed to function jointly and dialectically in a State where the rule of law applies. While the rules in force (objective law) are an instrument of power, at the same time, the author notes, individuals must have the ability to use the law to gain protection against the excesses and arbitrariness of power (subjective law). However, Lochak observes that the regime applied to foreigners is very often akin to that of a police state in the sense that subjective law tends to be denied and objective law is often left to the arbitrary rulings of administrative authorities.<sup>21</sup>

## Expressing 'bare life', between madness and resistance

- 14 Expressing 'bare life', for those who have experienced it, is retelling an 'event', in the sense of Michèle Leclerc-Olive (1997: 20): 'something that causes an irruption, a discordance, that introduces a change, that marks a discontinuity' in a biographical trajectory; but it can also be, in some cases at least, attempting to resist it by speaking up.

### The mortification of bodies

- 15 The ordeal of negated humanity features prominently in several accounts of the arrival in the Canary Islands followed by the placement into a detention centre. Interviewees do initially describe their sighting by Guardia Civil patrols as a relief when their makeshift boats have made it to the destination. The crossing is over; a stage in the journey has ended. Like the Red Cross workers that come to take care of them very quickly, the members of the Guardia Civil can be perceived as 'saviours', involved in a humanitarian assistance where they are recognized as human beings.<sup>22</sup> Very soon, however, these are followed by accounts of depersonalizing and humiliating experiences of being undressed, submitted to a body search, crammed behind safety barriers, interrogated by police, etc. These practices have been examined in the sociological literature on places of confinement: to mention only a few examples, these include Goffman's famous book (1968) on asylums, Carolina Boe's work (2015) on the detention conditions of imprisoned foreigners in France and the US and Makaremi's study (2009) of the techniques for managing and rationalizing the deportees' bodies.<sup>23</sup>
- 16 Kader left for Morocco in 2002 with the goal of being recruited by a Moroccan football team and continue his studies there. After a change of plans, he attempted to cross to the Canary Islands from the Moroccan Sahara. He was returned to Morocco and ordered to leave the country immediately after a police check – the alternative being deportation to the Algerian border. Disillusioned, he decided to go back to Senegal. I met him through Amadou, who he had met in Morocco. We arranged to meet at his place, in the suburbs of Dakar, but when I did come, Kader was hesitant, claimed he didn't want to look back on his past anymore, out of fear of reopening wounds. He eventually agreed to talk me, and we chatted for nearly three hours in his room. At the end of the interview, he thanked me for listening to him non-judgmentally. Kader recounted the moment when his boat was intercepted by coastguards off the shores of

the Canary Islands. He also told me about being transferred by boat to the Lanzarote detention centre and about waiting upon his arrival on the island behind a 'red and white cordon': 'those are the barriers they put up to mark out the area where an accident occurred', he explained. Perceived as humiliating, these barriers symbolize the casting off of pariahs to his eyes. They are a 'social fence' (Fischer, 2005), introducing a break from the order of ordinary interactions. Kader told me he found it painful to be stared at by the crowd of people, 'rubberneckers' and cameramen who were waiting for them on the island. He placed his hands over his face so that he wouldn't be recognized in a news broadcast by an acquaintance in his home country. His account reflects a contract between an anonymous treatment on the one hand, and the profusion of gazes and shots on the other, violating his privacy. 'Over there (in the detention centres), we're nothing, only illegal migrants', Kader adds.

- 17 Over the course of several encounters in Saly, where he is housed by friends who also attempted to cross to the Canary Islands themselves, Thiarnow (26, married without children, holder of a technical degree in commerce) narrated a partly similar experience. A few days after leaving Saint-Louis, in Senegal, his boat drifted and was intercepted by Mauritian coastguards. On the ill-treatment he suffered in the detention centre (after which he was deported to the Senegalese border), he repeatedly told me: 'it's as if you were an empty bag'. Expressing the unequal value of lives embedded in relations of power and domination, the phrases 'being nothing' or an 'empty bag' recur in descriptions of the relationships with agents in charge of policing the borders. Upon his return to Senegal, Thiarnow was placed in a mental health facility for a few weeks. Violence, as it is put into words, is also about being dispossessed of an identity, 'for oneself and for others' (Dubar, 1991), an experience that can have a profound impact on bodies, as Véronique Petit, Pizzolato Giulia and Ly Mouhamed (2014) demonstrate in a broader study on the effects of international migration on the mental health of migrants in Senegal.
- 18 These discourses on the 'mortification' of bodies, to use Goffman's term, must be resituated: first, as I previously noted, they are only a part of the discourses conveyed – at other times, the image of individuals who are actors of their own destiny is highlighted (Pian, 2009a, Canut in this issue); second, they do not in any way preclude the occurrence of acts of resistance in practice. These may take the form of tactics or micro-tactics aimed at resisting the 'bare life' of confinement, as described by Olivier Clochard (2016) in his research on foreigners in administrative detention in various European countries. Speaking up, as 'action and social praxis' (Canut and Sow, 2014: 11) can be crucial. Some may resist by publically asserting their rights – like migrants turned away and returned to Senegal (Pian, 2011b) or others 'stuck' in Maroc (see Fiston Massamba's account, collected by Claire Rodier (2006)). Another dimension of discourse also deserves examination: the production of rumours, 'formulated in contexts that imply events, gestures and affects' (Bonhomme, 2009: 30),<sup>24</sup> through which these individuals try to resist the sense of an uncertainty that escapes them, even though these rumours may at the same time create more uncertainty. The second part of this section looks into these rumours.

### Facing arbitrariness: the production and circulation of rumours

- 19 Based on an ethnographic study at the CETI centre (Temporary Centre for Migrants) in Ceuta, Andersson (2014) argues that keeping people waiting is an important means of



'temporal management' of European borders. He analyses the complex geography and temporal landscape of borders, in which the swiftness of State intervention, relying on advanced technology (to intercept boats, migrants who try to cross borders indicated by barbed wire fences) helps subjecting migrants to experiences of slowness and waiting. Likewise, based on research on asylum seekers and foreigners in UK detention centres, Griffiths (2014) evidences several subjective forms of waiting depending on the detainees' possible temporal projections. Similar experiences are related by migrants who were detained in the Canary Islands. Cheir's account below exemplifies the experience of 'sticky time' the author describes to refer to the duration and slowness of a wait that supposedly will end with a change in situation: *'we wait, by day, and even by night... The Spaniards gave us plastic shoes, toothpaste, a little bit of detergent... They bring us two meals a day. A policeman comes by regularly with a list of around ten names... Rumour has it that if they call your name at night, you're going to be repatriated, and if it's by day, maybe they're going to take you to Spain'* (30-year-old fisherman, repatriated to Senegal in 2006).

- 20 This account, however, does not solely convey temporal uncertainty; it describes a twofold uncertainty – temporal *and* spatial – relating both when and where he will be transferred by the authorities. These places of confinement function in an asymmetrical relationship to information: the institution takes information from bodies but does not give out any information. This is why migrants cling onto rumours, based on which they hope, lose hope or start to doubt: as Cheir explains above, depending on the time of the day when the agents come for them and the duration of their detention, the migrants think they will be repatriated or not. In his book on the political sociology of rumours, Aldrin (2005) shows that the lack of official information is conducive to the spread of rumours, regardless of whether they are false or confirmed. In his study of 'bembas', the rumours that punctuated the everyday lives of political prisoners under the Argentinian dictatorship (1976-1983), Emilio de Ipola (2006) showed that, as they lacked information on their (immediate and long-term) individual and collective fate, the prisoners held on to the 'bembas', 'sources of hope as well as fear, but primarily DIY means to make sense of misinformation and uncertainty' (p. 174). While rumours must be understood as threefold movements of production, circulation and reception of discourses, they must also be analysed as relations – if not power relations – within the institutions.
- 21 In the case discussed at here, the uncertainty as to what will become of migrants (transferred to the Iberian Peninsula or sent back to their home country) is heightened by the opacity of the readmission procedures used by the Spanish and Senegalese governments (Pian, 2009 b), which have given way to waves of deportation, but also to several waves of transfers to Spain. Uncertainty also means leaving things up to chance and fate: whenever the rules of the institutional game appear arbitrary, a space of opportunities opens. Challenges to the 'borderscape' (Cuttitta, 2008) may then take the form of a circulation of legends from the places of departure. In the suburbs of Dakar and in gatherings of young Senegalese men, I heard the following tale on several occasions, with a few variations. <sup>25</sup>A fishing master steers a dugout canoe containing around sixty passengers to the Canary Islands. Right before being deported, he warns the Spaniards: 'if you send me back to Senegal, I'm going to come back and I'm going to bring even more people'. Sometime later, he makes it to the Canary Islands again with twice as many passengers on board. He is again turned away and reiterates his warning. The third time, he gets to the Canaries with three times as many passengers. The

Spaniards do not dare to turn him away and he is transferred to Spain. This narrative, which has a plot and a resolution and refers to a highly topical subject (boat crossings to the Canary Islands), has a moral message of perseverance – if everything remains possible, this is also because there are no foregone conclusions in migration policy, as its legal framework appears to be both discretionary and arbitrary.

## Conclusion

- 22 Although the fieldworks discussed here are a few years old, they raise questions that remain deeply topical, as was exemplified in February 2017 by the attempts made by several hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants to cross into Ceuta and Melilla collectively. One of the contemporary features of borders – terrestrial or maritime – is the number of deaths they create, as shown by data provided by the IOM (2014; 2016) and numerous migrants' rights organizations. Depending on one's vantage point, borders may materialize and symbolise protective inclusion or deathly exclusion. Over the course of migratory experiences, however, there isn't a single register of discourse on death, but a variety of discursive orientations depending on the references of the context of enunciation. By looking at how 'lived experiences' are 'put into words' (Canut and Sow, 2014: 16), I have attempted in this paper to pinpoint invariants and similarities in ways of *telling* what is perceived as violence at the borders by those who attempt to cross them illegally. If we consider language as an 'activity of configuration' (Cassirer, 1972: 30) producing 'different forms of conception of the Self and the World' (*Ibid*: 33), these narrativizations tell us about the ways in which institutional order (or dis-order) is perceived and experienced, which condition relationships to State agents. Studying narratives may then yield insights into how borders are also shaped *in* and *through* discourse.

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## NOTES

1. Detention centres can however also be analysed as spaces of circulation – see Kobelinsky and Makaremi (eds), 2009.

2. See also Fassin (2011).

3. In an approach that emphasizes political authority, the term 'borderland' reconsiders the relations between centre (of a State) and peripheries (Cusco, 2016) with an attention to confines and margins, and an awareness of political and symbolic dimensions.

4. See also the 2014 issue of the *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 'Composer (avec) la frontière. Passages, parcours migratoires et échanges sociaux' [Negotiating Boundaries. Passages, Migratory Itineraries and Social Exchanges], edited by Puig, Bontemps and Hily.

5. Those are unfortunately beyond the purview of this paper to discuss and would warrant a paper of their own.

6. On the concept of lived space, see also Séchet and Veschambre (ed.) (2006).

7. Without going so far as to conduct an actual linguistic discourse analysis, the approach at work here seeks to overcome the limitations of a strict content analysis in terms of socio-political context.

8. I conducted fieldwork in Morocco between 2003 and 2007 for the purposes of my PhD in sociology. Additional fieldwork was conducted in 2009 under the Eurobroadmap project on representations of Europe in the world (URMIS/RIATE/ITC, Paris 7). The Senegal fieldwork was conducted within the framework of the ANR-sponsored research project MITRANS [Transit migrations in Africa: local and global dynamics, political management and actors' experiences], URMIS-SOLIIS-Institut Français d'Afrique du Sud.

9. In both cases, the corpus comprised a majority of men aged 20 to 40. I met over 80 individuals, adopting the ethnographic interview method, which frees itself from the 'dominion of statistical thinking' (Beaud, 1996: 234), and treats interviews as 'situations of observation' (*Ibid.*). For more details on the conditions of my fieldwork, see Pian (2009a).

10. On the multi-site approach, see Marcus (2010),

11. The Senegalese individuals I met in Morocco at a time when they were trying to cross into Europe illegally called themselves 'adventurers', up to the point where they gave up on crossing (Pian, 2009). On the other hand, the Senegalese I met in Senegal, who had left the Senegalese coast to travel to the Canary Islands on dugout canoes did not consider themselves as 'adventurers'. To them, the term only applies to those who make a long journey to Europe in several stages (through Morocco, Libya, etc.), sometimes taking several years. On the social relationships expressed through the uses and different definitions of the word 'adventurer', see Pian (2009) and Cécile Canut's paper in this issue.

12. Even though it can be made fun of, as Kobelinsky's contribution to this issue shows.
13. See for instance research by Emmanuelle Bouilly (2008) on Thiaroye-sur-Mer, a municipality located in the Pikine department of the Dakar region.
14. The so-called 'Jola country' is located in lower Casamance, in the south of Senegal. The Jola are the majority ethnic group there, but they are also present in other places including Gambia and Guinea Bissau. On the Jola and related political issues, see Foucher (2003).
15. On the diversity of the sociological backgrounds of the Senegalese who have attempted an illegal crossing from the Senegalese coast, see Pian, 2011a. Barring incidents, crossings are expected to take around ten days.
16. The perceived risk is regularly played down by seasoned fishermen, who are used to going out to sea for several days in a row for a living.
17. Senegalese rappers have also embraced this world, in a number of productions that both sound the warning on the dangers of illegal immigration and denounce the European migration policies as well as the Senegalese government's position. See Moulard-Kouka, 2014.
18. Here I refer to the concept of framing in discourse. See Cefai (2001).
19. On this subject, see also research by Schindel (2016) on the practical and discursive relation between the new control technologies introduced on the European borders and the increased exposure to natural hazards faced by foreigners seeking to enter Europe illegally.
20. On police violence in Morocco, see for instance MSF's 2005 and 2013 reports. MSF, 2013, *Violence, Vulnerability and Migration: Trapped at the Gates of Europe. A report on the situation of sub-Saharan migrants in an irregular situation in Morocco*, [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/docs/ngos/MSF\\_Morocco18\\_en.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cmw/docs/ngos/MSF_Morocco18_en.pdf), last accessed on 10 July 2018; Médecins Sans Frontières, *Violence and Immigration: Report on Illegal sub-Saharan Immigrants (ISSs) in Morocco*, 2005, <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2005/oct/MSF-morocco-2005.pdf>, last accessed on 10 July 2018.
21. Several ethnographic studies have shed light on another facet of institutional violence. While the absence of law or failure to comply with the law (with arbitrary detentions and/or deportations, etc.) is an issue, there is also in some cases an overabundance of law, with the multiplication and juxtaposition at national and international levels of laws, regulations, and conventions creating a highly complex legal framework that sometimes escapes the migrants (even when they are assisted by lawyers). Studies by Mathilde Darley on detention centres in the Czech Republic and Austria (2009) and Olivier Clochard (2014) on the Nicosia prison (in Cyprus) effectively show the complexity of the 'hypertrophic legal administrative power' (Makaremi and Kobelinsky, 2009: 21) faced by foreigners in their dealings with the institutions in charge of sending them away.
22. Comparatively, the members of the Guardia Civil in charge of surveillance in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (in Northern Morocco) are perceived much more negatively (see Pian, 2013 and Kobelinsky's contribution to this issue). This is explained to some extent by the abuses committed in this border area, and more largely by the fact that migrants have been turned away there without due process. Such practices are regularly denounced by migrants' rights organizations. See for instance: Cf. Cimade et Afvic, *Les refoulements et expulsions massives des migrants et demandeurs d'asile*, 12 octobre 2005, ([https://algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf\\_fr/afvic\\_cimade121005.pdf](https://algeria-watch.org/pdf/pdf_fr/afvic_cimade121005.pdf)); Joint report 'Ceuta et Melilla, centres de tri à ciel ouvert aux portes de l'Afrique', by Migreurop and Gadem, December 2015 ([http://www.migreurop.org/IMG/pdf/fr\\_rapportconjoint\\_ceutamelilla\\_decembre2015.pdf](http://www.migreurop.org/IMG/pdf/fr_rapportconjoint_ceutamelilla_decembre2015.pdf)). See also the 2015 report of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture: <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/esp/2015-19-inf-eng.pdf>.
23. For a broader analysis of how humanitarian and security-oriented discourses mix in the management of migrations, see Cuttitta (2005) on Lampedusa.
24. The author makes a distinction between rumour and 'belief', in that the latter is more deeply rooted and 'more reliant on the persistence of the representation within the group' (*Ibid.*, p. 31).

25. Variations especially concern the number of passengers.

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## ABSTRACTS

Drawing on a variety of fieldworks conducted with migrants who attempted to cross into Europe illegally, this paper examines the making of discourses on death and on violence at the borders and by the borders. The first section identifies different registers of discourses on death, which refer to physical death in the literal sense and social death in the figurative sense. The discourses that touch on death or the threat of death in these journeys to Europe are however characterized by significant nuances, depending on whether they aim at legitimating, justifying or even rationalizing emigration, at conveying extreme experiences of dealing with natural barriers, or at describing the forms of institutional violence experienced during the journey. The second section looks at how the experience of the opaque management of migrations – particularly in detention centres – fuels certain rumours, which may be seen partly as a means to resist uncertainty. These narrativizations tell us about the ways in which institutional order (or disorder) is perceived and experienced, which condition relationships to State agents. Studying narratives may then yield insights into how borders are also shaped *in* and *through* discourse.

En mobilisant différents terrains menés auprès de Sénégalais cherchant à rejoindre clandestinement l'Europe, l'article s'intéresse à la fabrique des discours sur la mort et, partant, sur la violence *aux* et *des* frontières. Une première partie met en perspective différents registres de discours sur la mort, registres faisant référence à une mort physique au sens propre ainsi qu'à une mort sociale au sens figuré. Les discours évoquant la mort ou le risque de mort dans ces routes vers l'Europe comportent toutefois de profondes nuances selon qu'il s'agisse de légitimer, justifier voire de rationaliser l'émigration, de faire part d'expériences extrêmes confrontant aux obstacles naturels ou de décrire les formes de violences institutionnelles vécues dans le cours du périple effectué. La seconde partie s'intéresse à la manière dont la confrontation à une gestion institutionnelle opaque des migrations – notamment en centre de rétention – alimente la production et circulation de rumeurs, qui peuvent être vues, en partie, comme un mode de résistance à un contexte d'incertitude. S'intéresser aux mises en mots invite alors à se demander si les frontières ne se forment pas, aussi, *dans* et *par* les discours.

Movilizando diferentes trabajos de campo llevados a cabo entre senegaleses que buscan llegar de forma clandestina a Europa, el artículo examina la fábrica de discursos sobre la muerte y la violencia *en* y *de* las fronteras. La primera parte pone en perspectiva diferentes registros de discurso sobre la muerte; registros que se refieren a una muerte física en el sentido estricto y a una muerte social en el sentido figurado. Los discursos que evocan la muerte o el riesgo de muerte en las rutas hacia Europa conllevan sin embargo profundos matices según se trate de legitimar, justificar o incluso racionalizar la emigración, de dar cuenta de experiencias extremas confrontándose a obstáculos naturales o de describir las formas de violencias institucionales vividas en el transcurso del periplo. La segunda parte examina la manera en que la confrontación con una gestión institucional opaca de las migraciones – sobre todo en los centros de internamiento – alimenta la producción y la circulación de rumores que parcialmente pueden ser vistos como un modo de resistencia en un contexto de incertidumbre. Interesarse por las formas



en que ello se pone en palabras invita a preguntarse si las fronteras no se forman, también, *en y a través de* los discursos.

## INDEX

**Palabras claves:** migraciones, fronteras, Europa, rumores, violencia

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