

Recent African migration to South America: The case of Senegalese in Argentina

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Abstract

African migration to Latin America is new and is made up by mixed migration flow. The arrival of these new migrants appears to agree with the trends identified by international studies about African immigration which refer that, in general, the migratory flows have diversified and become dense, and the migrants have begun to move to non-conventional destinations with which they do not have previous linguistic, cultural or colonial bonds – like the Argentinean case -. This is partly due to the deepening of the economic instability of West Africa between 1980-1990 and the restrictive policies of the EU and USA after September 11th, 2001. Argentina is the most important country of destination for one flow of West Africans, mainly Senegalese, Ghanaians and Nigerians. Specifically, in this article we present a characterization of the Senegalese migration in Argentina with the intention to contribute to the study of this new south-south African migration flow.

Keywords: Immigration, Africa, Senegal, Argentina, South-south migration

1. Introduction

This work is framed in a greater project developed since 2007 by a group of anthropologists, project that intends to characterize the new Sub-Saharan African migrations towards Argentina and their relationships with a heterogeneous set of groups that include the Argentinean descendants from slave populations, Afro Latin American and Caribbean migrants and Cape Verdeans and their descendants living in Argentina. The migration dynamics between Africa and South America remain understudied and, as Marcelino and Cerrutti (2011) pointed out, there are a lack of substantive and sufficient studies on the theme and ethnographic field work in depth.

According to Freier (2011), African migration to Latin America is new and growing and is made up by mixed migration flows, including economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Argentina is the most important country of destination for one flow of West Africans, mainly Senegalese, Ghanaians and Nigerians.

Specifically, in this article we present a characterization of the Senegalese migration in Argentina. We pay special attention to the local characteristics of insertion of Senegalese people in Argentina, the formation of migratory and labor networks, religious organization and migrant associations. It is pointed out the particularities of Argentina as a receiving country, country that considers itself “white and catholic” as a result of the European immigration, and that, however, has a population of African origin since a long time, as well as indigenous population and Asian and Latin American migration. Then, it will be depicted the heterogeneous Senegalese “community” of Argentina and its relationships outside the group, especially with the Afro-descendant population with which the Senegalese have begun to build joint spaces of action in favor of a greater visibility, of fighting against racism and xenophobia, of their rights as migrants, etc.

2. The population of African origin in Argentina.

The idea of an Argentina ethnically homogeneous and “white” is a construction born since the beginnings of the process of the nation development; as regards this, Segato (2007) suggests that the lack of pluralism in the society is linked, on one hand, to the idea of uniformity as requirement for basing the citizenship on universal assumptions, and on the other, a “panic to diversity”, what produced a deliberate political will for eliminating any ethnic feature, pressing the ethnically marked people to change their origin categories through formal and informal mechanisms of persuasion, distortion and even extermination.

With reference to Africans and their descendants, he added that “the disappearance of the blacks in Argentina was ideological, cultural and literally constructed rather than strictly demographic (...) their presence was first excluded of the official representation that the nation gave to itself” (Segato, 2007:255).

On the other hand, Frigerio (2008) points out that together with the existence of a dominant narrative of nation that emphasizes whiteness, a system of racial classification that usually invisibilizes the black and states that both factors, together with some theoretical frameworks once in fashion, have conditioned their academic studies in such a way that most research works carried out in Argentina during the twentieth century are focused on the topic of slaves and free blacks between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.

Early document information refers that the first arrival of black slaves in Buenos Aires took place already in 1585. From then on, we could refer to a systematic arrival due to the constant requests of settlers, who considered them indispensable, due to the lack of indians in that area.

The demographical increase of the city of Buenos Aires that characterized the eighteenth century was due especially to immigration, both the immigration coming from the inland part of the country towards the port and that coming from abroad, which was greatly influenced by the forced arrival of Africans, estimated in 45,000 individuals between 1740 and 1810.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, Afro descendants reached the 25% of the population of Buenos Aires, formed part of the Army and fought in the English invasions and in the Independence campaigns between 1810 and 1825.

The last census which refers to racial categories is that of 1887, where it is recorded a sharp decrease of up to 2% of the African population. The history of Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires in the twentieth century has been of steady demographical decline.

According to Reid Andrews (1989), the disappearance was only in the sense that Afro-Argentines became almost invisible in the ethnic mixture of the city. The blacks continued existing as an active and identifiable ethnic entity in the city, but whose members were reduced to insignificance compared to the large amount of Italians, Spaniards and other Europeans arriving in the city.

The disappearance/invisibility of the Afro-Argentines establishes a rupture, both objective and symbolic, with a new migrant group arriving from Africa at the end of the nineteenth century and the mid twentieth century: the Cape Verdeans.

This group mainly settled in the riverbank areas of La Plata River, in Dock Sud, Boca and Ensenada localities. Following other immigrants' traditions, they organized themselves in associations of mutual aid and, similarly to other groups, both the new comers and the descendants were active members of an “Argentinization” process, when promoting, inside the group, an identity strategy mainly characterized by “invisibility” of the African component. Strategy that Cape Verdeans already developed in their homeland, where the social structure, strongly conditioned by the Portuguese supremacy – Cape Verde became independent from Portugal in 1975 -, led them to “whiten” in order to achieve both a positive identity and a social improvement. Actually, we could speak of a replication of the model: invisibility of Africa in Cape Verde is the invisibility of Cape Verde in Argentina (Maffia y Ceirano, 2007).

However, in the 1990s the Cape Verdean community started an increasing process of “visibilization” Also, for more than a decade, the Afro-Argentines have begun to vindicate their historical and contemporary place in the society and to demand their recognition as “black Argentines” and to be compensated by the historic debt linked to slavery and discrimination.

These demands for visibilization of the Argentinean Afro-descendants and the recognition of the contributions in the construction of a national identity coincides with what we can call a new moment in the arrival of population from Africa to Argentina: migrants who come from Senegal, Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cameroon and Guinea, among other countries (Zubrzycki et al, 2008).

Since the 1990s, but mainly since 2000, their presence has been intensified in the main cities of the country, and specifically in the city and province of Buenos Aires.

The arrival of these new migrants appears to agree with the trends identified by international studies about African immigration (Maffia, 2010), which refer that, in general, the migratory flows have diversified and become dense, and the migrants have begun to move to non-conventional destinations with which they do not have previous linguistic, cultural or colonial bonds – like the Argentinean case -. This is partly due to the deepening of the economic instability of West Africa between 1980-1990 and the restrictive policies of the EU and USA, particularly in the period after September 11th, 2001.

According to Marcellino and Cerrutti, after over a decade of continual arrivals from Africa, it can be pointed out a number of factors that would explain partly the conformation of this new “migratory corridor” between the African continent and South America: the growing impossibility of having access to developed or “first world” countries; the Argentinean migratory policy, relatively open, and its regulations that recognize migration as a human right; the extension and porosity of its borders together with the State incapacity for controlling all the entries and exits; the little control towards the informal commerce, activity performed by many migrants (not only Africans) (2011:2).

However, we should note that even though the new Migratory Law (law in force since January 2004) has many positive aspects compared to previous laws, it has still some restrictions and hindrances for entering and obtaining residence, especially for non-Mercosur migrants (Ceriani Cernadas and Morales, 2011). Among its advantages we should highlight the rights to health, public and free education, that is to say, a migrant does not need either to prove his/her migratory status or to show his identity card for being assisted in a hospital or to send his children to school. However, not everything is so easy for the African, Latin American or Asian migrant since the racist relationships pervade Argentinean everyday life.

3. Senegalese migration in Argentina.

Among the new Sub-Saharan African migrants arriving in Argentina, the Senegalese are undoubtedly the most numerous.¹

In agreement with the Senegalese migrations all over the world, the migrants coming today to Argentina are Wolof and belong to the Mouride brotherhood, though there are also members of the Tijane brotherhood, as well as members of the ethnic group Diola, where the first Senegalese migrants in Argentina belong to.

They are mostly men between 20 and 40 years old, single, with and without previous international migratory experience. Those who are married have travelled alone, leaving their families in Senegal; very few have travelled with their wives or they have come later².

Many Senegalese arrive directly in Argentina by plane, but most of them, in the last five or six years, have entered the country from Brazil. In Senegal there is neither Argentinean embassy nor consulate where to have a visa processes (the nearest embassy is in Nigeria), but there is Brazilian embassy therefore they can ask – and obtain – visa for entering such country as tourists through the main airports.

Once in that country, they go by land to Sao Paulo or another important city in Brazil and from there they travel directly to Buenos Aires city, the political and economic center of Argentina. This journey is carried out with the help of a small Senegalese group that have lived in Brazil for several years.

This crossing through Brazil-Argentina border (and lately Paraguay-Argentina and Bolivia-Argentina) is done irregularly, that is to say, through places and crossings that are not allowed or out of use. As a result, the migrant does not have legal proof of his entry to the country, situation that then prevents him from beginning any procedure as regards residence and attainment of legal documentation in Argentina, once denied the refugee request.

¹ The last national census of population carried out in October 2010 and whose first results are just being known, yielded a total of 2738 Africans living in Argentina. As the data are not yet defined by countries, we cannot know how many come from Senegal. However, we have to take into account the sub-record of many foreigner population that for many reasons – among them the fear of being undocumented – were not surveyed. From the Senegalese community, they estimate that there are 3000 migrants presently living in Argentina.

² But this does not mean that women do not migrate, as it is shown by Evers Rosander in his works (1998, 2005).

In some few cases, the migrants arrive in Brazil by cargos, not as stowaways but with the crew connivance and knowledge (Marcellino and Cerrutti, 2011); this trip is much less expensive than by plane.

There are also some Senegalese that arrive as stowaways in the ship hold, but these are exceptional cases. It is worth mentioning that from the Argentinean communication media, most times the African migrants are labeled as refugees, fleeing from famine, extreme poverty and victims of the people trafficking.

Partly, this is explained, on one hand, by the existence of a discourse victimizing the migrant all the time, and on the other by the confusion between refugee and refugee seeker: almost every Senegalese arriving in Argentina begins the application³, but very few obtain the refugee status (this was mainly achieved by the first Senegalese from the Casamance zone arriving in the country)

Beginning the procedure of refugee request involves, in many cases, a strategy for obtaining some kind of legal documentation – a provisional residence certificate called “la precaria” – which is given to the applicants until a ruling is issued, situation that could last a couple of years. With this documentation, the refugee seeker is entitled to work, study, move within the territory, etc.

Similarly to other migrants, every Senegalese arriving in the country has a relative, acquaintance or referent in Argentina to contact, that is to say, they are inserted in migratory networks and chains related to putting into practice the community solidarity (Lacomba, 1996), reciprocity and the representation that the Senegalese migrants have of them (Riccio, 2001).

As Crespo (2007a) points out in his analysis of African migration to Catalonia (Spain), an element that keeps the migratory networks alive is the bonds that the migrants have with the original society. The migratory networks are not structures developed for the departure or for the trip, they are also for the migrants’ circulation in multiple directions, including the society of origin.

The new migrants take advantage of belonging to the local networks of the pioneers, of contacts and relations that the first comers have developed in different fields: labor, social, cultural, familiar.

In Argentina we could trace at least two of the networks formed from some pioneers⁴.

On one hand, a network consisting of Diola migrants from Casamance zone. They were the first arriving in Argentina by the mid 1990s and in general they work in activities different from street sale: they work as waiters and cooks in bars and restaurants, as mechanics, builders, and some of them in connection to the artistic activity, mainly musicians, dancers and dance and African percussion teachers. Several of these migrants belong to Tijane brotherhood.

On the other, there is a wider network formed by Mouride migrants. According to Minvielle (2010), the first Mouride successfully settled as trader in Argentina came from Diourbel and arrived in the 90s. This pioneer “opened the way” and began a network since the beginning of 2000 and it is still fully running. These migrants are from Wolof origin, though there are some Serer. Most of them work selling trinket on the streets.

This does not mean that the Mouride network and the commercial one are the same. Riccio (2001) draws the attention on the fact that even though the “Mouride phenomenon” cannot be neglected as regards the role that acquires in the migration, the brotherhood is not directly involved with its organization; the Senegalese migratory networks are heterogeneous. Though connected, the Mouride networks of belonging and those commercials are not mechanically overlapped but they help each other in their development and besides, they are not closed systems with rigid borders since the Senegalese of other brotherhoods, for instance, can use them.

Indeed, in this collective there are migrants that do not work in the street sale and there are others that are inserted in the formal labor market, but they mainly work in the informal sale.

³ As example, between 2006 and 2008, period of greater flow of Senegalese to the country, there were 438 refugee applications from this collective, but only two were recognized.

⁴ Traoré already pointed out in his work of 2008 the presence of two different Senegalese groups living in Argentina: on the one hand Wolof migrants coming from Diourbel and on the other Diola migrants coming from Ziguinchor.

On the other hand, the Senegalese are not the only Africans that sell trinket on the streets; there are also people from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Cameroon, among others. The trinket and watches sale was a commercial niche non-exploited by that time by the vendors who dominated the informal market, particularly Latin American migrants, who sell CDs, clothes, trainers, cosmetics, glasses, flowers, fruit and vegetables.

As regards informal sale, it should be also mentioned that in some cities where the Senegalese move, hawking is an activity against the law, and therefore, the vendors are not free of persecution, fines and confiscation by the police, town hall controls, etc.

The goods for sale are necklaces, rings, bracelets and watches that are bought in Argentina or Brazil; there are several Senegalese wholesalers who the street vendors can turn to, but it is not a circuit which, at least by now, is controlled entirely by Senegalese.

The commercial bonds with Senegal are scarce, though there are Senegalese that constantly travel⁵. These Senegalese, who can leave Argentina and enter again, have the necessary documentation for doing so, that is to say, they are in a regularized migratory situation. Many Senegalese, who have the permanent residence, obtained that by a Law Decree from 2004 that lasted six months and allowed the migratory regularization of people coming from regions outside Mercosur. The other most common way by which they have obtained the permanent residence is for being married to Argentinean women or for having Argentinean children.

We should digress and point out that even though the commercial relations and the periodical trips to Senegal are not constant, there is a very strong link with the place of origin, as it has been analyzed by several authors who have studied the Senegalese migration in different parts of the world. The link with Senegal is expressed in the constant sending of presents and money through the Senegalese who can travel; the constant telephone calls – every Senegalese in Argentina has a mobile phone-, the communications through internet, Skype, Facebook, etc. Many of the Senegalese whom we have interviewed watch daily, through the web, channels of news from Senegal, sport events and also this last year they have followed through internet the Grand Magal.

When returning from their trips to Senegal, those who work in commerce usually bring some “ethnic” products, such as masks, musical instruments and clothes that are sold in rented shops in commercial galleries of the town center but their customers are not mostly Senegalese.

Very recently, in two or three of these shops assisted by Senegalese women, informal hairdresser’s began to work where hair plaits in the “African style” are made, and in some cases artificial hair fittings are sold also brought from Senegal. The customers are either African or Argentinean women.

Regarding the new comers, upon arrival in Argentina, most of them already know that they can work on hawking, being able to begin working the following day after their arrival. In fact, many have experience as street vendors or in shops in Senegal. Soon they obtain goods for selling which is transported and offered in small “black briefcases”. The new comers have small briefcases, with few products and, in general, during the first working days they begin selling together with another more experienced Senegalese who already speaks Spanish.

Generally, this first goods delivery is on loan and they pay for them during the first three or four months in Argentina. Then, each vendor buys and restocks the sold goods; in few cases they prefer selling the goods belonging to another person and not investing in buying their own goods. Hawking is characterized by the constant mobility and circulation in search of the best labor opportunities, not only in different neighborhoods of Buenos Aires city.

Morón, Varela, Avellaneda, Lomas de Zamora, La Plata, among others, are the first places close to Buenos Aires city where the Senegalese began selling trinket during the day, while they lived in hostels from “Once”⁶; after a while they began settling in these localities to avoid the continual daily journey.

⁵ The trip to Senegal is long and expensive, since there are no direct flights to that country from Argentina.

⁶ This is the name of Balvaneda neighborhood (Buenos Aires city) close to Miserere Square and to the train station Once de Septiembre, commercial center and where traditionally, European Jews, Arabs and Armenians settled, and more recently Koreans, Chinese, Peruvians, Bolivians, among others.

Today, there are Senegalese living in the main cities of Argentina, offering their products during the week, but they continue their constant circulation through fairs and markets during the weekends, through provincial fairs and celebrations throughout the year, through beaches during summer (Agnelli and Kleidermacher, 2009), between Argentina and Brazil (Minvielle, 2010), and between Argentina and Senegal, to a lesser extent.

The zone of Once is mentioned by some authors as “Little Dakar”, for having a large number of Senegalese living there (Marcellino and Cerrutti, 2011; Reiter, 2011), vendors in its streets, shops rented by Senegalese and even a kiosk-telephone booth called “Touba Argentine”, assisted by a Senegalese couple. In this shop it is served Senegalese food and it is visited by many Senegalese during the day.

At the beginning, the first Mouride migrants settled in an Once hostel, occupying over time, the rooms of the three floors of the building⁷. This is the narration of a migrant interviewed at the beginning of 2007:

“Most Senegalese are living together, eating together, doing everything together; everything is done in the hostel. Every month we gathered to talk if there is something new or if there is a problem, for example, if there is a mate who does not have money or has health problems (...) or if there is another problem, for example a Senegalese who arrives and does not have a place to live”.

In parallel to the organization meetings of the hostel, these migrants and others who lived in different places gathered every Wednesday in a rented apartment in the center of Buenos Aires, place exclusively destined for the first dahira established in Argentina, dahira that still meets in the same place.

4. The Senegalese association and their relation with the “African diaspora” in Argentina.

In Argentina, the Senegalese migrants have created associations either religious or non religious. According to Bava (2004), at the beginning the religious Mourides associations were associations of mutual help that act, for instance, in the reception of just arrived migrants and answered to problems of health, of administrative documents, of accommodation, etc., but also allowed their members to meet for praying. Then progressively, these migrant disciples organized themselves and created dahiras abroad, in order to send money regularly to Touba and to be in contact with their marabouts.

Crespo (2007b) points out that the expansion model of the Mouride brotherhood follows a polycephalic and polycentric dynamics, which does not respond to a predefined strategy but to the principle of continual or immediate economic and social adaptation. The knot that the Mouride network allows to weave is the dahiras; the model of religious association allows that in every place where Mourides live, a member of the brotherhood can arrive and be received, this person will have access to the first information and soon will begin to work, will have a bed and protection.

Therefore, in all those places where Mourides migrated, it is hardly surprising that the first Senegalese groups in Argentina were religious.

In Buenos Aires there are two dahiras: one Mouride, one Tijane.

The dahiras are spaces of high symbolic content where some religious rituals are celebrated, but the most important ceremonies or celebrations are performed in specially rented places, since these are occasions when a great number of Senegalese men and women gathered. These places are usually a room in the mosque Al-Ahmad or in the Islamic Center, both in the city of Buenos Aires.

As Moreno Maestro (2006) analyzes it for Seville (Spain), these migrants in Argentina give sense to the place where they arrive, not only for the transnational economic and social relations and for the creation of solidarity networks, also transnational, but also for the activities that imply the space re-definition in symbolic terms, mainly through rituals, which allow them to reaffirm the belonging to a same community of believers, the Islam.

As the Grand Magal is the most important Mouride celebration, some Senegalese who are in conditions of travelling to Senegal, that is to say, have the money for the trip and the documentation for leaving and entering the country again, travel at that moment.

⁷ A similar situation is described by Suarez Navaz (1996) in connection to the first Senegalese settled in Granada (Spain).

Those who stay in Argentina, that day go to Buenos Aires city. As the celebration is under the Moon calendar and these last years it has been in summer months, a great number of Mourides that are working in the summer season on the coast, especially travel that day for attending the local celebration.

We transcribe a fragment of an interview where our interlocutor tells us how he gets ready for the festivity in Buenos Aires:

“What we do is to organize a feast here. The members of tariqa from here during all the year contribute, financial contribution that is what I mean, for the feast organization. Because we have to rent a place, to buy the food, etc. Besides, there is a part of the money that is sent to the supreme boss of the brotherhood and this part must arrive before the Magal of Touba (...) The Mourides who cannot travel send their contribution and at the same time organize the festivity here. Complying with the duty implies not only sending the contribution but also celebrating that day here.”

Another event which was organized by Buenos Aires dahira and which was very important for the Mouride community was the religious visit - ziyâra-, in August 2008 of an important marabout of the M'Backé family. In 2009, another marabout, though less important, visited Buenos Aires, setting the city as a forced destination. Bava (2003a) refers that in the migration context some cheikhs or marabouts visit regularly their talibé, what is considered by the migrants as a rewarding act, since the talibé are those who visit their master in Senegal. This practice of marabout circulation outside the African continent has been developed in Europe since 1980. With the increasing migrations, they became rapidly necessary for the cheikhs, who obtained evident material advantages and achieved a regular approach when strengthening and framing the Mouride community abroad.

These visits are ways of marking Mouride territory beyond Touba borders and indicating the disciples the behavior they should have in the migration in order to be “good Mourides”, as well as the financial resources they produce, destined to the brotherhood management in Touba. As Crespo points out, it is necessary persons connecting some dahiras with others, strengthening the network, and these agents are the marabouts who travel through Africa, Europe and USA (Argentina, now) from dahira to dahira, comforting the talibé, orienting them, informing about the situation in the country of origin, transmitting new orientations of the Califa and collecting contributions from the faithful to the brotherhood and for the emigrants' families (2007b: 256).

But the dahiras are not the only Senegalese associations in Argentina.

The Senegalese of the first dahira created in Buenos Aires, themselves, in 2006 began thinking about the possibility of creating a new formal civil association serving as intermediate between the religious groups and the Argentinean State, and between the immigrants and the Senegalese State. The first president of the Association said in an interview:

“The Argentinean authorities do not know these religious structures and therefore, there is no formal recognition by them. The idea of the Senegalese association was proposed ... brought by the dahira members. They suggested the idea and proposed taking the presidency to me. They suggested the creation of an association because they realized that with the religious structure of a brotherhood they could not solve their problems, that it was necessary a Civil Association, recognized, with legal status and everything that is needed to be inserted in the formal circuit (...) They realized that their association (dahira) is valid in Senegal, but here it does not represent anything and therefore, they need an association of legal type meeting the requirements, etc. That is why they came.”

The Association of Senegalese Residents in Argentina was founded officially in 2007 and was presided for the first two years by a migrant from Casamance, the second Senegalese arriving in Argentina by the mid 1990s and who is currently a professor of African art in a university of the Great Buenos Aires. The association is formed either by Mourides or Tijanes, as well as by Wolof, Diola and Serer migrants. Since 2010, it is an organization recognized by the Argentinean State (with legal status) and its board of directors is made up by individuals who are in regularized migratory situation, that is, at least they have temporary residence; many of them have formal jobs. In Argentina, having the migratory documentation is a necessary requirement for being able to form part of the management of this kind of organization, though it is not a requirement for becoming member.

The present president is Diola, from Casamance and for several years he has been working in a car factory; the secretary of the association is Serer, he studied Language at the University of Dakar and he is currently studying Sociology at the University of Buenos Aires; the assistant secretary is a Diola woman who studied Law in Dakar. The association interacts with Estate organisms, such as the National Direction of Migrations, entity with which it has been trying to solve the problem of migratory irregularity of most Senegalese population. It has also had several interviews in the Foreign Affairs Ministry in order to create a Senegalese consulate in Argentina. The association also has relations with the Senegalese government and with Senegalese embassies in Washington and in Brasilia (the latter, recently authorized for receiving procedures and documentation from Senegalese people living in Argentina)

On the other hand, the association has among its interlocutors the organizations of “African diaspora” in Argentina⁸.

In 2007, when the Senegalese association was being created, several Afro-Argentines, Afro-Latin American migrants and Sub-Saharan African migrants, together, organized the cultural event called “The African week in Argentina”, event that since 2004 had been performed only by Africans grouped in the Union of Africans of the South Cone⁹. The African week of 2007 was sponsored by the Embassy of South Africa in Argentina, through the political advisor, who was interested in supporting the activities of visibilization of Africans in Argentina, in relation with his incorporation to the Sixth Region: the African in the diaspora.

At the first organizational meetings, representatives of different organizations of Afro descendants and Africans in Argentina, participated, among them the Society of Mutual Help Cape Verdean Union ; Organization Africa Lives (Afro-Argentines); House of the Indo- Afro American Culture (Afro Argentines); Civil Association Union of Africans in the South Cone; Civil Association Africa and its Diaspora (Africans, Afro Peruvians, Afro Ecuadorians, Afro Uruguayans); Nigerian Association in La Plata River; Senegalese Residents in Argentina; Afro Brazilians and Haitians, among others.

In these meetings, some unsolved disputes and conflicts arose in the core of this collective that searched to be identified as an “African diaspora”, and that is why some organizations and individuals stopped participating. After the event in May 2007, the group that continued, after several arguments, decided to become an entity called Movement of the African Diaspora in Argentina. Several conflicts within the group made some organizations leave the Movement, among them the Association of Senegalese residents in Argentina.

However, both groups kept in touch, and together with the Association of Haitian Residents and IARPIDI (Association of struggle against racism led by a Congolese immigrant) opened an own meeting space that is used as seat of each one of these organizations in September 2011.

It is necessary to highlight that not all the Senegalese immigrants make use or know the association. In many cases, when they do not have concrete problem to begin the procedures for the migratory regularization or problems with estate organisms of control, such as the police force, they use the services of other institutions, such as foundations and civil associations of help to the migrant and refugee (some belonging to the catholic church and evangelist church), institutions that have free services for legal advice and escorting.

5. Final reflections

So far, we have referred to some parts of our research in process, pointing out some peculiarities of the Senegalese migration in Argentina with the intention to contribute to the study of this new south-south African migration flow. We have pointed out a number of factors that would explain partly the conformation of this new migratory corridor between the African continent and South America, for example, the growing impossibility of having access to developed or “first world” countries and the relatively open Argentinean migratory policy.

⁸ In the so-called diaspora organizations in Argentina, such as the “African Association and its Diaspora”, “Movement of African Diaspora in Argentina”, “Union of Africans of the South Cone”, etc, migrants or descendants of the northern countries of Africa do not participate, though there many migrants from Morocco, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, etc. in Argentina

⁹ This is an association founded by a person from Cameroon in 2002 and at the beginning was made up by people from Cameroon, Ghana, Congo and some few from Senegal that were in the country by that time.

Most of the Senegalese immigrants in Argentina are young and male who move towards Argentina for economic reasons. The new migrants take advantage of belonging to the local networks of the pioneers, of contacts and relations that the first comers have developed in different fields: labor, social, cultural, familiar. This migrant heterogeneous network facilitates the Senegalese socio-economic integration as street seller. That is, as Crespo (2007a) has related, diaspora, like any migratory network, needs stable points, settled members of the community who form a recognized part of the society of residence. But it is necessary to take into account that there is diversity among Senegalese migrants and plurality of trajectories.

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