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The figure of the adventurer as an African migrant

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African migration is not determined just through misery and danger. Personal ambition is an important catalyst compelling the more intrepid to hit the road. The decision to leave can result in a pressing urge to change lifestyle, to invent new ways of life, to explore far-off lands, real or imaginary. The migratory adventure is not only synonymous with a departure abroad – close or distant; it is also similar to a moral experience which is tightly correlated with risk or intensity of life. After introducing the different promoters of the African migratory adventure, the article will show that more and more African women, in the process of their migration, claim the status of the adventurer for themselves. Then, the times of adventure will enlighten, the beginning, the time of youth, and the end when the migrants come back home. Several outcomes to the migratory adventure are also possible. Upwards, for those who are able to convert their mobility capital and connect themselves to transnational networks. Downwards, for exhausted and socially unaffiliated individuals who can neither continue to move on nor turn back, because they are estranged by their countrymen.

Keywords: African migration; sociology of migration; migratory adventure; glorious return; women

In contrast with commonly held preconceived notions, African migration is not determined just through misery and danger. Economic imbalances between continents, demographic pressures in some regions, and political and military turmoil are not the sole causes of departure among the various populations. Individual motivations are just as essential, and personal ambition is an important catalyst compelling the more intrepid to hit the road. But this personal ambition is not necessarily understandable as rational behaviour if understood from the point of view of micro-economic theories of migration. The decision to leave does not systematically result in 'costs-advantages calculations' but can also result in a pressing urge to change lifestyle, to invent new ways of life, to explore far-off lands, real or imaginary. If seen in this way, migration is also similar to a moral experience.

Crossing the Sahara and the straits of Gibraltar or passing through the island of Lampedusa, African migrants have often been described as adventurers by the media since the beginning of the third millennium. Their trajectories are sometimes assimilated to those of desperadoes and outlaws. Do these assignations echo *emic* designations, or are they an exercise aimed at criminalizing the migrant? What does the migratory adventure look like? Is it is only synonymous with a departure abroad - close or distant? Does the adventurer constitute a new figure in the history of African migration, or is the adventurer better viewed as a recurring motif? This adventurer has entered the spotlight recently as the politics of migration become more pressing all over the planet, rendering the free circulation of humans both an intensifying need and increasingly problematic. Is there a feminine model to the adventure? Ultimately, if the adventure has a beginning, it also has an end; and it is these endings and outcomes that need to be explored.

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1. The pioneers of the African migratory adventure

The figure of the pilgrim

In his book *Voyage au bout de la route*, the French anthropologist Franck Michel distinguished two categories among the Western travellers: the *homo pelegrinus* and *the homo peregrinus*. The first category includes pilgrims animated by religious belief and the missionary project, travelling mostly alone. The second group includes explorers, conquerors, and storekeepers travelling sometimes in small groups and above all motivated by the pursuit of glory (Michel 2004, 200). According to Michel, pilgrims are not adventurers. Conversely, for James Clifford, the better transcultural term for travel would be 'pilgrimage' because 'It includes a broad range of Western and non-Western experiences and it is less class- and gender-biased than "travel"' (Clifford 1997, 39). The journeys of Muslim West African migrants who have been walking long distances to reach the holy places of Mecca and Medina can also look like an adventure. During these long travels, female or male pilgrims can also exchange goods or experiences, broadening their lifestyles, creating new horizons (Battuta 1929; Moraes Farias 1989; Kane 1997; Aboubacar 2005; Coleman and Ead 2005). Besides, students originated from West Africa also covered thousands of miles, mostly on foot, in search of teachers. El-Hamel properly showed how this quest for knowledge was based to a large extent on individual desires and personal ambitions (El Hamel 2002). As for Denise Barros and Mustafa Abdalla, they applied themselves to describing the various steps of pilgrimages begun by Dogon populations since the mid 1930s from the compendium of narratives. Even before the migration turned towards Ghana or the Ivory Coast, pilgrimage to Mecca used to enable the nationals from the village of Songho, the Dogon region of Mali, to discover new challenging ideas, new imaginative horizons based on life experiences. 'Pilgrimage … became the motive for crossing spaces and venturing in new environments, physical and in lots of case imaginative… It is a move that provides people with the possibility to dream, to think and to live differently' (Barros and Abdalla 2012, 3–4). These works show that individual agency and consequently migratory adventure are definitely not a colonial or postcolonial condition among African migrants.

The figure of the jaguar

Jean Rouch was among the very first Africanist anthropologists to explore the psycho-social determinants of migration (Rouch 1956). On the eve of African independence in Ghana and the Ivory Coast,[1] he told of young migrants who entered towns on the lookout for exploits known as the 'verandah boys', who christened themselves the 'Jaguars', in reference to the British automobile manufacturer's sedans which drove them crazy. During the 1950s, they lingered beneath the arcades of the business houses in Accra or Kumasi and dreamt about a vision of Europe. The jaguar became the icon of young African itinerant migrants who blended into their adopted surroundings like well-known felines, moving between Mali, Niger, Gold Coast, and Nigeria to discover the life, and to explore and test otherness. In these Colonial Gold Coast cities, they quickly learnt local languages as well as English, and adopted urban ways of dressing, moving, entertaining. They set up in local markets and explored new areas, seeking new opportunities. Accra and Kumasi become the best places for them to make their dreams come true; to be out of the ordinary, to give a new sense to their lives, but also to return as heroes. They combine the same characteristics, the same skills as the jaguar: strength, courage, bravery, daring, agility, flexibility, boldness, opportunism, and solitude.

The Malian anthropologist, Isaïe Dougnon was also interested in the Dogon and Sonrai populations, having emigrated to Ghana in the years 1920–1950. Like Jean Rouch, he explains that this migration had above all the character of an initiation:

> To go to Kumasi and to bring back luxury objects led to the building up of the identity of the mature man, his open-mindedness, he could become a man who has reached physical and mental perfection. And as a result the man who decided to settle down ensured his prosperity. This new conception of the journey to Kumasi was so popular that the French colonial administrators took measures to stop the rush of their subjects to Ghana (Dougnon 2008, 5).

Thanks to this 'prestige migration' and the objects of luxury consumption brought back to the village, these young Malians and Nigerians were renamed 'Kumasi Boys' and could get married and eventually be considered adults (Dougnon 2007). Alone or in small groups, these young Dogon people later explored the other 'jaguar destinations'. They started to go to Abidjan from the 1960s. Jean Rouch describes in 'Moi, un Noir' how Nigerian dockers and unemployed manual labourers dreaming of a better tomorrow gather every Sunday in a cinema of the Ivory Coast's capital to watch westerns featuring Buffalo Bill and rebroadcasts of Sugar Ray Robinson's bouts.[2] Denise Dias Barros also explains how the craze for Bamako followed on from the enthusiasm of the Dogon populations for Kumasi and Accra (Barros 2010). This seasonal migration of adventure-seeking characters did not only concern several generations of young villagers, girls as well as young boys, but it also became widespread within a national frame. We come across the same configuration again in Burkina Faso where, depending on the opportunities, very young villagers decide, on their own or within a group, to go to Ouagadougou or Abidjan in order to try their luck (Hashim and Thorsen 2011). In other words, adventure does not necessarily imply migration to far-off places only.

For an African migrant, the adventure consists then in having contact with the attributes of Western modernity, by going into the urban scenes which are within reach. In these conditions, it is not always necessary to go very far; this is unlike the Western adventurers who still today remain attracted by the distant, unexplored, and exotic lands.[3] Finally, the African villagers who leave and go into these unknown cities can walk along together with friends, relatives: their adventure is not always solitary, unlike the common adventuring practices of Europeans. Adventure and the fact of being part of kinship networks and local communities are not incompatible.

The figure of 'sapeur'

Whether they settled down in or just passed through African boomtowns, these youth are the ancestors of what we shall call the adventurers, these marginal youths who represent a post-colonial African emigration to France.[4] Gandoulou provided a portrait of them and their arts of getting by between 'Paris and Bacongo', 20 years later. This emigration initially attracted unschooled boys, originating for the most part from the Bacongo district in Brazzaville in the French Congo (Martin 1995). In the early 1970s, these idle youth envisioned the move to France as an initiatory voyage, a ritualized path allowing them to acquire the 'gamut' of designer clothing that will ensure their consecration as an adventurer once they return to their homeland. Their emigration is profoundly cultural. The SAPE[5] or sparkling elegance, symbol of the West, is envisioned as the surest shortcut to social success and Paris is considered as the world capital of *la Sape* (a slang term indicating dapper dressing). The *sapeur* is a future adventurer in the sense that he earns this title only once he has accomplished a glorious return to the homeland following a fruitful stay in the French capital. The adventurer is the accomplished form of the sapeur (Gandoulou 1989). Self-realization takes precedence over the economics of such a project to such an extent that the quest for a steady job in France does not feature in the scenarios envisioned nor are the economic possibilities very glamorous or prestigious. The adventurer totally frowns upon the behaviour of the Sahelian migrants who 'sweep the floor or who are perched on a dumpster', preferring finagling, scraping, getting by when he does not succeed in finding an occasional

job. To live as an adventurer is too absorbing, requires too much from the individual to leave room for another type of concern. While the *sapeurs* share the same geographical space as African students, functionaries, and workers, the emerging legitimated African elite, their practices are completely apart; they evolve in a make-believe world. The Congolese society only considers the exhibitionistic aspects of their approach to adventure. On the occasion of trips back to Brazzaville, those who christen themselves the *Parisians* parade through their hometowns in groups, decked out in SAPE sanctioned designer clothing, perfumed and made-up. And as for the *sapeur*, clothes, finery, as well as body control, exhibit the achievement of success, in the materialistic and commonly accepted sense (Rowlands 1996). This way of being centre stage, even though more discreet, was also one of the behaviours of the migrants met by Rouch and Dougnon in Ghana.

In their latest works Rémy Bazenguissa and Janet MacGaffey explain that the adventure, like the adventurer, do not have the same meanings on both sides of the Congo river.

> The principal terms used to refer to the migration experience and the activities it involves are 'l'aventure' and 'la débrouillardise'[6] ... 'L'aventure' entails the use of physical and mental skills and sometimes even putting one's life in danger. In 'l'aventure', migrants do not stake assets which after all they don't possess (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000, 54).

They live off their wits. In Brazzaville, the adventurer is a rather positive figure and his accomplishments are celebrated through songs. His route is associated with that of the *mikiliste*,[7] who went to France or Belgium to accumulate wealth and who, although strongly influenced by his intense migratory experience, will feel like an outsider as soon as he travels back to his own country. It is a different matter for Kinshasa, where the adventure would have more negative connotations. The adventurer is sometimes the one who sets about seducing the mistresses of others, sometimes the one who failed in his attempt to make his own way and who hides out without being able to get back home with dignity. But all these Congolese migrants share the same objectives: being ready to face dangers, to implement all the means at their disposal to gain some money and find fulfilment, to shape their own identity. Outside their home country, they feel more authorized to get involved in illicit activities (drugs and stolen goods trafficking) renamed *bizness* or *circulation*. The migratory adventure is comprehended once again as a lifestyle allowing one to escape a gloomy, predictable, everyday life and to find fulfilment.

The figure of the diamond trader of the Senegal River Valley

In the case of young migrants from the Senegal River Valley the search for diamonds, first in West Africa, then in Zaire, can also be seen as an adventure.[8] These former diamond dealers very frequently used these terms to describe their journey: 'I ventured..., I looked for adventure, I fell into the adventure ... we were adventurers'. They would stress the incurred risks and the bravery they had shown to complete this perilous initiative successfully away from home. These young people who had embarked on the rush for precious stones, at the dawn of decolonization, were prompted by a pressing thirst to discover the world and to make a fortune (Bredeloup 2007). They did not intend to follow the trail of their elders who kept farming barren lands in the Senegal River Valley. The farm work was absolutely not a part of their life plan.

> I was the first in the village to leave the country, except those who left for their military service. We are peasants, but peasants were happy with what they earned, because they did not know of anything else. So they were proud of being peasants. As soon as the guy cultivated his field and it worked, and he has cattle, he feels like he is the President of the Republic ... As for me I preferred to leave; each man has his own ideas. Maybe I was a bit more courageous than them, I wanted more...[9]

Nor did they feel like setting up shops on the markets of Saint Louis, Dakar, or Abidjan, like the majority of their fellow countrymen. As a result, they opened up new migratory and

professional prospects, facing the unknown, going into new roads and becoming actors in stories of their own making.

Their adventure reveals itself to be primarily individual; it corresponds to the desire to be free, to a rejection of familial or statutory constraints judged as being too rigid; it signals both a refusal of the immobility to which a society dominated by an omnipotent gerontocracy condemns them, and a thirst to discover new horizons. 'In truth, when I wanted to leave, my brothers were opposed. They didn't want me to go because first of all I was young, I was 17… I too thought about living the adventure in my life. The desire to leave kept me from being reasonable and working with my brothers'.[10]

The desire to distinguish oneself from others and to find fulfilment, taking perilous initiatives, and making pioneering approaches: these are just so many characteristics which seemed to contribute to describe the migratory experience of these traffickers in precious stones and to differentiate their experiences from those of other African migrants whose approaches had been supported by parents or relatives. During the time of the decolonization of the continent, these farmers' sons gave up farming to take part in clandestine diamond mining.

They moved from one country to another, as and when new deposits were discovered, trusting to luck and also breaking the laws of the host countries. Aware of being involved in a race against time, they managed to be the first ones to discover stones, moved up through the ranks of the business and were able to deal with the diamond merchants from Jewish and Lebanese diasporas. Often at short notice, the first arrivals or the most audacious ones learnt on the job how to value the stones, through spending time with the buyers. They tried to anticipate the sites of new diamond discoveries going on ahead to zones barely explored to initiate commercialization channels and to become the preferred partners of the foreign diamond dealers.

These activities are not seen as morally reprehensible by the traders of the Senegal River but are considered as a way – risky, but fast, efficient, and legitimate – to grow rich. The end totally justifies the means in their eyes. That sort of thinking is pragmatic: the traffic of precious stones is an effective way of becoming rich quickly, provided they know how to corrupt the customs officers and the other state employees, and know how to take advantage of the ignorance of the natives and of the local disorders which shake the diamond producing regions. In their minds, their own practices are not a contravention of the legal constraints that states place arbitrarily on cross-border exchanges, nor the various measures taken to regulate the illicit extraction and the commercialization of precious stones and metals. The mining of these resources is sometimes forbidden to all foreigners, sometimes allowed to only some of them, the richest or those closest to the political authorities. They consider their activities to be no more illicit than those of De Beers, the South African cartel which made diamonds artificially rare by monitoring a big part of the world production and by redistributing rough stones sparingly on the international market.

The diamondiferous adventure could be interpreted as an avant-garde version of this new moral economy which today tends to spread on the African continent, a moral economy in which gratitude and respectability are acquired less by a repetitive and arduous work than by exploits and tricks (Bredeloup 2008). The pioneering figures of the *sapeur* or the diamond smuggler find an important echo among those who head for Europe today with the firm intention to 'look for their life', 'to sublimate their life'; that is to say, to break the monotony of daily life that affects the majority of inhabitants of African cities and in so doing to become authors of their own destiny precisely at a time in which Africa is immerged in a social and economic crisis. This tendency towards emancipation through migration, towards the affirmation of identity combined with the desire for greater autonomy had already been noticed at the beginning of the 90s when Isabelle Bardem was reconstituting the itineraries of young West African immigrants bootstrapping in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso (Bardem 1993). More recently, in the mid 2000s, African migrants interviewed in Tunisia or in Libya concretely explored new

ways of being and doing, taking risks to build their place in society in an autonomous, at times heretofore unseen, and innovating fashion (Bredeloup and Pliez 2005). The assertion of the adventure is a way of announcing the quest for values emanating from one's own assertion and achievements, rather than from one's surroundings, family, society, and institutions, which in their current configuration no longer truly allow a renewal of identity. The adventure is undoubtedly the opposite both of boredom and seriousness (Jankelevitch 1963). To depart thus equates to mobilizing 'a philosophy of action'. It is also to privilege the intensity of each passing moment, to abandon everything in order to find oneself, and to open up new and more stimulating horizons.

2. Women and the migratory adventure in the twenty-first century

The migratory adventure is most often presented as a specifically masculine issue. Several philosophers called the adventurous character of the Odyssey Ulysses into question, considering that this false traveller mainly wished to move back home and meet the faithful Penelope. However, this last one remained in these philosophers' minds the archetype of the immobile woman, the one who is waiting. According to Jankelevitch, men seek adventure while women expect it; this author considered women's experience to be solely romantic and love experiences, stressing women's supposed passivity. The differentiated role of men and women with regard to adventure was then presented as a practically obvious fact (Jankelevitch 1963). In the same way, female migrations have been for a long time described as passive: women travelling necessarily with their parents or their husband. These travelling women were portrayed as 'voluntary non-migrants' (Jonsson 2011). As far as individual female migrations are concerned, if we consider these as active, they remained widely concealed. The rediscovery of the woman's moving past is finally the result of new historiographical questionings, but also of some theoretical reconceptualizations about feminism in post-colonial Africa (Green 2002; Anieku 2006; Guerry 2009). In the early studies, Denise Barros, in particular, showed how Dogon women started to migrate to Bamako, independently of their husbands, from the 1980s (Barros 2010). Younger and younger unmarried women, on their own or within a group, moved to get jobs in the Malian capital, aiming in the first place to acquire the needed components for trousseau. The first ones to leave used to go into hiding, but progressively the movement got organized and institutionalized, with young women increasing the number of trips they made, while relying on women belonging to the same line already settled in the city. Some of these trips also resulted from a thirst for knowledge (in particular the learning of the Koran). For some of these women leaving to emigrate is similar to fleeing after an illicit union or an imposed marriage. Research carried out by Marie Lesclingand in Malian rural areas (in the Bwa ethnic area) had already led to an appreciation of the strong presence of female youngsters in internal migratory dynamics. The numbers of women setting out began to exceed the numbers of men setting out for urban areas (Lesclingand 2004). The author does not refer to the adventure concept but she puts the emphasis on the more personal logic ('individual promotion') that leads to travel and stresses the discovery of new lifestyles to explain these individual migrations. Besides, more women than men leave their villages secretly. Nonetheless, the fact remains that, on arrival, they rely on acquaintances to get a job, and to find housing. Others studies proved the importance of women's migration on the occasion of pilgrimages to Mecca.

> While under ordinary circumstances Muslim women are allowed to travel only in the company of their husbands or close male relatives, the pilgrimage is one of the few travel options available to lone women. As mentioned by some informants, the latter may even aspire to find an appropriate husband during their journey. However to which degree single African women stay on and establish

contacts with Arab men remains an open question requiring further research in Saudi Arabia (Pelican and Tatah 2009, 235).

In the past few years, journalists in particular have tended to draw a distinction between young male West African adventurers who have left their home country and attempted to cross the Atlantic on a pirogue, and women who have remained on the shore and organized themselves in collectives to fight clandestine immigration. The latter are turned by the media into brave, sacrificial mothers (Bouilly 2008). Other sources associate solitary feminine migration with prostitution. It seems difficult to go beyond the usual clichés when one wants to depict African women: they always appear as passionate divas, either as guilty militants or innocent victims, both in the African and the Western psyche (Hesseling and Locoh 1997).

Yet, some African women, in the process of their migration, claim the status of the adventurer for themselves. In so doing, women who first traded the content of mere 'shopping bags', then later of proper containers between Africa, Europe, and Asia, endeavour to find a place for themselves in a society still largely dominated by men. In Marseilles in the mid 1990s,[11] we met African female migrants who explicitly insisted on their identities as adventurers. A whole new generation of young women had just opened restaurants, shops, and hairdressing salons in the derelict city centre. From their back shops, these businesswomen negotiated containers of European recycled tires for Senegal, as well as Ivorian or Cameroonian coffee to be sent to some parts of Europe. All they needed was a fax machine and a few order books and address books: from this, import-export companies, fragile, fleeting, but with an international span, were born. When their occasional suppliers failed to meet their demand, they left for Dubai to buy gold-plated jewels and for Belgium to shop for wax fabrics, directly from wholesalers or from factories (Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2004). These women mostly came from an urban background: Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Central African Republic, or Senegal. They had to take up many challenges to build these little business empires. They also had to breach a number of institutional practices and habits from their home countries to affirm themselves as individuals. First, the majority share an often chaotic family history and matrimonial career. Some arrived in Marseilles after they had refused an arranged marriage or been granted a divorce. Others could not count on lasting support from their family to finish their secondary or higher education. They also preferred, in their own words, to 'overcome fate' and to 'try their luck in the adventure'. Adventure is defined partly by the fact of going through a trial and going beyond oneself. The stress which these women often endure when they leave their country or flee from it, and the enthusiasm with which they embark on unfamiliar horizons, they later interpret as distinctive features of adventure. It echoes the definition suggested by Georg Simmel: '(Adventure) is characterized first and foremost by the radicalism with which it manifests itself as a tension particular to life. It is through the intensity of such tensions that an ordinary event is turned into an adventure' (Simmel 1912, 87).

Far from home, in an unfamiliar world, these women have to face new trials, often alone. Business, which they all experienced at some stage in their childhood simultaneously with their school career, is then the safest way for them to create their own job but also, in the long run, to find a place for themselves in France. It gives them both economic success and respectability. Trade can easily become a female activity, and these women may also temporarily form partnerships to increase their influence in the business world. For instance, in 1999, five women who were already well established in Marseilles gathered together to found the organization 'Nanas Benz de France'. Like their role-models – female millionaire loincloth sellers from Togo who drove Mercedes Benz cars in Lomé up to the late 1980s – they wanted to gain their independence through international trade and to embody the new success of migrant African women.

More recently, within the frame of other surveys about female African shopkeepers and traders travelling between Asia and Africa,[12] we realized that some of them also spontaneously used the notion of adventure to describe their migration experience (Bertoncello and Bredeloup 2007). What meaning can we give to the increasing use of this concept by migrant women? Did they want to give themselves higher prestige in the eyes of the researcher who was interviewing them, by adding dream and imagination to an ordinary career? Does the migratory adventure adhere to a new mythology enabling any individual, who is travelling away from the usual migratory networks and desperately looking for meaning in his or her quest, to give an epic dimension to their life tale? These women discover a professional milieu dominated by men: industrialists, wholesalers, guides, middlemen, or customs brokers. They have to gain respect and sometimes make use of their gender as a positive resource in these commercial transactions. They pose either as women with character or as weak ones (the seducing girl or the tired mother) to gain respect, and to foster possible complicity, to try to access the legendary 'generosity' of men towards them and, in so doing, be granted very advantageous prices. Some are better skilled than others in alternating thoughtfully between seduction and timidity. In the countries they cross, they become aware of current racial and gender prejudices and prove capable of exploiting them and increasing their economic profits. They use a whole range of tactics to gain the assistance of a porter, advantages from a wholesaler, to limit taxation, and to avoid seizures by customs. These strategies are not quite the same in the host and home countries, which makes it necessary for them to know the habits of both 'here' and 'over there' and to be clever enough to use them properly. At home, they play on their multiple contacts in the administrative and political spheres to obtain significant decreases in customs duties. It appears that customs brokers are more reluctant to impose taxes on women who are overplaying their role as mothers in charge of a family, or who hint at the lack of female social advancement in Africa. It is noteworthy that women manage to get business visas more easily than men, as the diplomatic administration seems less fearful of women taking advantage of it to settle in the country at stake. It also explains the rapid growth observed lately of female journeys to Asia. Gender prejudices regarding the intentions of traders give women an unusual power in negotiations. Femininity, though it is often regarded as a handicap in business, thus turns into an asset.

But the representations of women who set out alone on a journey remain very often negative in African societies. In colonial Africa, women emigrating to towns ('town women'), contrary to rural women, were already likened to immoral, corrupt, and money thirsty women (Davis 2000), considered as 'prostitutes' rather than 'modern women', in spite of their strategies to raise healthy and educated children (Haram 2004). As a result, the women storekeepers need to use all their energy to break the prejudices. Most often, women start to travel within a group together with one or two relatives, friends, or neighbours who are an authority in the profession and who represent, thanks to their high morals, protection against rumours. Women in a group can then move or stop in unknown places and public spaces, without fearing disapproval. Women traders step up in Marseilles or those who travel back and forth to Asia try to depend on reliable witnesses who will be able to help to answer a possible accusation. They also bank on generosity to the family in order to strengthen their position. Some take charge of the schooling of children belonging to the widened family, support the projects of the oldest, or finance family and religious ceremonies in the home country. These actions all aim to increase their personal and family prestige. The others help their husbands in their professional occupations and sometimes finance them while remaining very discrete; so that their husbands can save face. The female adventure remains quite limited, and its boundaries marked; it is very quickly stigmatized and more often associated with prostitution practices. That is why women can only move to adventure if they can receive moral protection.

On the other hand, women can become full-fledged adventurers only if they are depicted as such in literature and research, as adventure exists first and foremost in the mind of the subject who lives it or tells about it. It is not so much the risks taken nor the trials endured, nor the achievements that matter, but the way they are highlighted. Female shopkeepers living in Europe and far-travelling traders often spotted in Asia do not hesitate when claiming for themselves the status of adventurer, just like their male counterparts, but this chapter of their history is still to be written. These 'female African adventurers' are neither heroines nor truly independent women. They endeavour to find a place for themselves in the globalized society, most often preferring to struggle on their own and dodging, through more or less complex strategies, the moral reproofs that may be targeted at them. This quest for autonomy looks like an adventure, but must also be understood in the context of continuous economic decline in Africa and of the growth of the individualization process.

3. The migratory adventure: a stage in life?

Adventure rhymes with youth

Invariably, both migrants and researchers alike present the taste for adventure as a desire for youth that should disappear with the onset of maturity. These clichés were reinforced in Europe within the literary models upheld by the Romantic current. 'Youth would be predisposed to adventure because of a supposed natural ignorance. And since romantic esthetics value a certain ignorance, adventures take on a new value – all the more in that romanticism as we know greatly identifies with the new age of adolescence' (Venayre 2002, 73). In most adventure stories written in the West aimed at a young audience, the adventure is identified precisely as a youthful whim that comes to an end when the hero marries, thus entering adulthood. The young man settles down for good. The migration seems to be a rite of passage; it is an essential stop on the way to independence and adult manhood. For Simmel as well, 'adventure doesn't square with the lifestyle of old age … it is par excellence the lifestyle most suited to youth' (Simmel 1912, 82). What ties youth to adventure resides in the intensity of the tension with which it allows us to feel life.

If for the Parisian *Sapeurs* the years pass and the number of cycles repeats itself, the adventure too has its limits. 'Nothing says that an adventurer remains one throughout his life, we live out our youth' (Gandoulou 1989, 140). The migratory adventure is indeed envisioned as a stage in the life of a man just like his settling down. In the same manner, those who the villagers of the Senegal River valley today christen adventurers are those youths who go into the precious stone business in Angola while refusing to maintain deferential relationships with their elders, former adventurers who have become diggers, traders or have simply retired. The adventure belongs to a certain time of life for Africans too. We would not go into the adventure for all its life. The adventure lasts some time: a *sapeur* back home in good conditions will become an established man while a diamond dealer will become a 'big boss'. The adventure would be a passage, a transition. And the danger linked to the migratory adventure would make this experiment even more ephemeral.

However, we have to dispute the validity of the naturalized link between youth and adventure. Youth is not only a chronological age or this moment of transition between childhood and adolescence, but rather informs us about the condition of dependence of the individual, about its absence of autonomy towards the social orders of the family and the state.

The outcomes of the adventure

The adventure thus has a beginning and an end. One ends the adventure the way one began it, with the obligation of succeeding according to certain principles prescribed in each society according to the time period. The time of adventurous projects must be followed by the time of building

one's career. In the world of the *Sape*, former adventurers are considered as 'liberated'. Some have managed to enter a normal life in the Parisian suburbs and integrate into French society by way of the acquisition of a job or through marriage. This departure goes hand in hand with a symbolic notoriety in the adventurers' milieu and the confirmation of having attained the rank of an initiate. In the eighties, the outcome aimed at for Congolese adventurers was either a stable existence in Paris after several 'descents' or integration back into the society of Brazzaville. When faced with failure, the adventurer is however demoted back to his initial position as unemployed or as a petty smuggler.

Among West African diamond traders, several outcomes to the adventure are possible. Upwards, for those who are able to convert their mobility capital and connect themselves to transnational merchant networks; downwards, for exhausted and socially unaffiliated individuals who can neither continue to move on, nor turn back and who, because they are estranged by their countrymen, run a serious risk of succumbing to madness. Although migration allowed them to enter the struggle to forge a new character, only a few entertain the possibility of preparing a heroic return. According to the *fulani* tradition, the more difficult the exile, the warmer the homecoming; estrangement prepares for reconciliation between the hero and his people. A minority succeed in climbing the social ladder, providing Europe with desirable precious stones or opening bars on the banks of the Congo, while the large majority continues the struggle, taking big risks in or near the mining zones. For some, the adventure came to an end in West Africa where they vegetate to this day like *masta*[13] in Sefadu (Sierra Leone) or Seguela (Ivory Coast), while others continue their route to the Congo with the intention to consolidate their fortune. The lucky ones, rather rich and occasionally powerful, then invest in the posh districts of the Congolese, Burundian, Zambian, and Angolan capitals, acquiring villas and marrying the daughters of the local elite. Most of them, however, reconvert to the safer fabric trade or the selling of foodstuffs in central Africa, albeit in less dangerous regions. Finally, while some return from migration at the right time, granting themselves the means to reinvest, most of the diamond diggers remain abroad too long to keep up with doings in their native country and thus fail to make the most of their perilous enterprise. In general, for most, the adventure's outcome was far from heroic and culminated in resounding failures. And then, some who are no longer spoken of were unable to resist the violence of the adventure and succumbed to despair.

Physical death or social death? It is indeed the idea of physical death that constitutes 'the precious spice of adventure' as Jankelevitch wrote in his philosophical essay already quoted. The adventure is inconceivable without the possibility of death. Numerous migrants perish along the way, succumb to the adventure and terminate their journey in desert, forest, or sea. Numerous authors also insist on the restrictive and irreversible character of the migratory adventure. *The adventure is not open; it is delimited by the obligation to succeed.* The migrant must totally master the end of his adventure. His return home must be absolutely triumphant, allowing personal realization, 'to extinguish the debt of life' towards his parents and to support the projects of his dependents and relatives whose success will garner him even more prestige. The adventurer's return cannot be anything other than voluntary in order for him to increase his notoriety, strength, and don the clothes of the hero. Under these conditions, being escorted back to the frontier will inevitably result in the migrant's disqualification, in short, in his fall from grace. It will be interpreted not as an injustice perpetrated by an increasingly efficient political apparatus but as a personal failure. 'Badly returned' or even accursed, these men rendered lame by the adventure can sink into despair or alcoholism, even attempt to take their life unless they find the energy required to set off once again. 'Failure during the journey is worse than to accept social and geographical immobility: poor at the time of his departure, the warrior becomes pathetic' (De Latour 2001, 174). While time in hiding can be sidestepped, rejection by one's peers at home or in places of transit can destroy the adventurer. The adventurer is thus

condemned to the very mobility the institutions deny him through the construction of frontiers that are more and more impassable.

Conclusion

The figure of the adventurer obviously tends to be extremely heterogeneous. African adventure started far before European colonization in the time of the first pilgrimages. But today in Africa, the economic crisis, accompanied by a series of adapting structural policies, deeply shattered the usual representations of adventure. New models of social success appear in which adventure, in a revisited version, is now at the core of representations, because of the opportunities and expectations encapsulated in it. For each individual everything is now possible, the range of one's opportunities widens, on the condition that one decides about one's own destiny and proves willing to take risks and undergo new trials. Women are more and more likely to embark on migratory adventures. While today's West or Central African migrants on the lookout for adventure are mainly young city dwellers ready to take risks in order to find their way, some are illiterate while others have a university diploma or professional qualifications. Some are resolutely pioneering and individual while others become bridgeheads of future migratory networks. It is thus that Boureima, one of the first Burkinabe to explore the possibilities of employment in southern Italy, at first working in tomato fields around Naples, proclaims loudly and strongly the status of adventurer. Others would have placed him with the anonymous category of ordinary immigrant workers, given that he has spent the last 14 years working in a factory outside Milan, in northern Italy.[14] Yet he changed the name of the bar he redecorated in his neighbourhood in Ouagadougou to 'l'Aventura', to remember his first baby steps towards the Italian peninsula when he worked as a chauffeur in African embassies, struggled over his salary, and assisted diplomats in their duties of protocol, when the pleasure of discovery went hand in hand with the uncertainty of tomorrow. Today, settled down as a family man, he shelters family members who are down and out and contributes to the significant transformation of his village in the province of Boulgou thanks to his active presence in an organization of immigrants. In other words, adventurers are rarely free of social ties and what at first appears to be an individual project becomes quickly transformed into a family venture. It would be incorrect to think that the migrants who often venture off alone develop a solitary life path and define themselves as beings excluded especially from the family order. They are in no way banished. They might be joined later on by members of their family or village, much like Boureima or the majority of the diamond diggers I have encountered in my research. It is interesting to note this ambiguous relationship of the young person out to prove himself and then the need to relate back to the family or clan group or village or religious order. Others continue to associate with adventure partners whom they encountered while crossing deserts, hopping frontiers, sharing housing, circumstantially forming 'wandering communities' or going on to form metaphorical families. Finally, others will ask for the support of family members upon returning home or when the adventure path transforms itself into a dead end. What ties them all together however is a way of being in society, both free and interdependent, a way of envisioning life, faith in the future, an irrepressible need for self-fulfillment. To venture off equates to escaping in order to find life, to create new frames of reference, to construct oneself in an enduring fashion, well beyond the duration of the migration experience.

Notes

1. In addition to his articles on seasonal migration in Nigeria and Ghana, Jean Rouch directed a film entitled 'Jaguar', released in 1967. It is comparable to a 'road movie on foot', undertaken by three friends who hope to strike it rich on the Gold Coast before returning to their village.
2. 'Moi, un noir à Treichville' tells of the dreams and setbacks of youth residing in Treichville in 1957.

3. Today, the Western neo-adventure has become mainly virtual: it takes place for the main part on the cathodic screen.
4. See the preface written by J. Rouch in Gandoulou (1989, 8–15).
5. *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Elégantes* (Society of Ambience-makers and Elegant Persons).
6. Many writers on the Congo emphasize that the way to survive under Mobutu and after was through *débrouillardise*, solving their own problems outside official avenues.
7. Derived from *mikili* which means 'country' in *lingala* and by extension Europe; the *mikiliste* being the one who went abroad, to Europe, with a limited luggage.
8. Between 1992 and 2002, about 60 life tales were reconstituted, coming from gem traders that had settled back in their own countries or were passing through them (Dakar, villages in the Senegal River Valley – districts of Podor, Matam and Bakel, Burkina Faso, Mali), or that were still in the course of their migration (Abidjan, Geneva, Antwerp). For each individual, the retrospective biography was collected in several years and in different places. These biographies were collected in family groups or in villages, through a study of genealogy.
9. Interview conducted in Dakar, 1996, with a diamond trader.
10. Interview conducted in Dakar, 1997, with a diamond trader.
11. Interviews, life stories, and participant observations were conducted in Marseilles between 1996 and 2000 with African shopkeepers, to gain a deep understanding of the rule of African migrants in the building of the town.
12. About 30 African women were questioned in Guangzhou, Hong Kong (2006 and 2008), and Dubai (2012). Some were repeatedly met two years apart in different working situations in China. Supplementary life stories were taken in Dakar in 2012.
13. This term is derived from master; it means team leader, person in charge of a group of diamond diggers. The *masta* supplies shovels and pickaxes to dig galleries, he can also feed and accommodate the prospectors; in exchange, he gets back precious stones collected by the diggers as well as half of the sale price.
14. Interview conducted in May 2007 in order to better understand the different times of the Burkinabe migration between Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Libya, and Italy.

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