The cultural meaning of food and its polyvalent role in the construction of identity among Senegalese migrants in Italy

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Introduction

The paper presented here analyses the role of food and its cultural and social meanings in the process of identity construction among Senegalese migrants in Italy\(^1\). Most Senegalese migrants belong to the Wolof ethnic group and the Mouride Sufi brotherhood, one of the four main syncretic Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal. The vertical and horizontal ties of the brotherhood offer an organizational structure that is transferable to transnational networks. The brotherhood has a distinctive culture of emigration as a training experience.

In the first section of this paper I will give a brief historical overview of Senegalese migration to Italy. I will emphasize how the Senegalese in Italy exemplify the phenomenon of transnational migration, forging and sustaining “multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Glick Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc, 1994).

The second section will highlight the different dynamics that go into the process of Senegalese identity construction in the Italian society and the role of the consumption of Senegalese food. We will see how co-nationals tend to overcome religious and ethnic differences in a foreign country, in favour of a broader Senegalese identity connected to the concept of Senegal as motherland. Senegalese food becomes a strong connection to the motherland: as a mother who feed her children, Senegalese food from the same motherland nourishes all the Senegalese brothers, enabling them to overcome internal differences and fostering the creation of a sense of belonging to a Senegalese community in a broader sense.

The third section will explore the polyvalent role of food in the everyday life: for Senegalese transmigrants, Senegalese food and drink and their consumption at home, in the street, in Senegalese restaurants or African markets become “identity markers”, creating and reinforcing so-called “experienced identity” in everyday life. I will also analyse the role of food and drink in the process of construction of the so-called “displayed identity”. During particular important religious events and festivities, like Gran Magal (the annual celebration of the beginning of Bamba’s exile), where the Mouride identity is expressed on a collective level, the consumption of ritual meals plays a crucial role in maintaining the social and cultural cohesion not only of the Mouride brotherhood, but also of the Senegalese community.

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\(^1\) The paper is the result of a PhD research begun in 2004 and still in process, conducted with a multisituated approach in Northern Italy (in particular Turin) and Senegal (Dakar) with the anthropological methodology of participant observation, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.
1) The characteristics of transnational Senegalese migration in Italy: a brief overview

Senegalese migrants in Italy have a strong presence in the country. As we can see from the table below (Table 1), at the beginning of 2007, legal Senegalese residents in Italy numbered almost 60,000, and this number excludes irregular and clandestine migrants. It is also possible to observe a significant male predominance. The proportion of Senegalese women in Italy has been growing slowly particularly through family reunification, though it is still much lower than in other immigrant communities. Indeed, for cultural and economic reasons, many male migrants prefer to leave families (wives and children) in Senegal, rather bring them to the host countries.

Most Senegalese migrants in Italy belong to the Wolof ethnic group and to the Mouride Sufi brotherhood and come mainly from the groundnut basin in the north-western regions of Senegal (Baol, Djambour, Cajor), or from the capital, Dakar. In Italy, they are principally engaged in retail trade at different levels (from street sellers to small entrepreneurships) and factory work, in particular in the large factories of Northern Italy.

The high level of mobility across international boundaries that characterises Senegalese migration and the participation in transnational activities based on social, cultural, religious and economic linkages with Senegal provide an excellent example of transnational migration.

The early stages of Senegalese migration in Italy: characteristics, changes and continuity

Senegalese emigration increased considerably in the last third of the 20th century for mainly economic reasons owing particularly to the crisis in the traditional agricultural structure that follow the failure of the groundnut crop in the 1970s. This crisis produced the following historical pattern: first widespread urbanisation in Senegal, secondly West African internal migration, thirdly emigration to Europe (mainly France) and finally internal European migration (for example, to Italy from France) and a change of direction in migration to Europe (including migration directly to Italy) (Campus, Mottura, Perrone, 1992; Riccio, 2002).

France, for obvious historical reasons, constituted one of the first destinations in Europe for Senegalese migrants (Schmidt di Friedberg, 1984). Senegalese migration to Italy took off at the beginning of the eighties, with flows coming from France.

Direct migration to Italy increased rapidly after 1986, when France (along with several other European countries) closed its borders towards migration, following an increase in xenophobic posturing from right-wing parties (P.D. Fall, 1998). Perrone (2001) argues that there were other factors that reoriented these flows toward Italy. For early migrants, French educational systems and language acquisition in Senegal made France the logical destination-country for migrants. The next migrant wave, however, was composed mostly of uneducated people coming from countryside. For these migrants, France didn’t represent the same linguistic advantage, so they choose different destinations, and Italy was one of those.

This flood of immigration from different countries (not only Senegal) was something relatively new for Italy; the country was not prepared to face the issue. By the mid 1970s the first signs of the historical shift from a society of emigration and internal migration to a society of international immigration became visible. Although Italian emigration and internal migration could be cast as an industrial phenomenon driven by labour demand, foreign immigration into Italy is better understood as a post-industrial phenomenon (Pugliese 1991).

“There were social changes, often attributed to immigrants, which were instead connected with the broader economic framework receiving such immigrants. These changes from the earlier industrial
migration made immigration into Italy a model case, because of the power of its tertiary sector and the informal or shadow economy requiring an unorganised labour force prepared to accept any kind of working conditions” (Riccio, 2000). At the same time, the recent migratory flows highlighted several Italian social problems: the underdevelopment of social services; housing problems; rigid segmentation of the labour market; the spread of the informal economy; latent parochial and racist feelings spread throughout society; a lack of long term strategies to produce efficient policies; inequality and lack of internal integration between southern and northern regions (Mottura 1992). Beginning in the eighties, the cities of Northern Italy and their factories (like Turin and FIAT), which encouraged migration from the South of the country during the Fordist period, became the receiving context of international migration. The arrival of the “straniero” and the increased heterogeneity of this society created a general climate of alarmism and racism in Italy. All the stereotypes ascribed to migrants from South of Italy some years before, were now assigned to the immigrants from outside Italy (Pugliese, 2002). The racist behaviour of Italians could be clearly observed in the housing market, where tenants refused to rent to foreigners. This led migrants to situations of extreme overcrowding.

These days, Senegalese migrants face different conditions from those they encountered in the eighties, as described, for example, by Donald Carter in his work on Senegalese migration in Turin (1997). The housing situation has improved for immigrants to the extent that they no longer see signs in windows that say “We Don’t Rent to Foreigners or to Southerners” (Benenati et al, 2002), and yet many of the Senegalese migrants we interviewed expressed concern that behaviour towards “foreigners” continues to be ambivalent. They maintain that a general atmosphere of xenophobia still lingers.

The transnationalism of Senegalese migration: different ways of being transmigrant

Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristine Szanton Blanc (1994) have argued that xenophobia and racism can be a force to encourage international migrants to lead transnational lives. “Racism in both U.S. and Europe contributes to the economic and political insecurity of the newcomers and their descendants; and the nation building projects of both home and host society build political loyalties among immigrants to each nation-state in which they maintain social ties” (Glick Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc, 1994). For migrants, transnationalism can be a resistance tactic to confront the increasing vulnerability of their new social setting.

The transnational nature of Senegalese migration, and a high level of mobility (not only within the host country, but across international boundaries in relationship to more that one nation-state) have characterized Senegalese migration to Italy, with a continued “back and forth” trajectory (Castagnone et al., 2006) that has many migrants living part of the year in Italy and the other part in Senegal. Thus, Senegalese transmigrants provide an excellent example of transnational migration: these migrants shape new transnational spaces through their movements, maintaining connections, building institutions, conducting transactions and influencing local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated.

Glick-Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1994) were the among the first to argue for a transnational approach to the analysis of international migration, emphasising that migrants cannot be characterized as “uprooted”: they are engaged in a social process in which they establish social fields that traverse geographic, political and cultural borders.

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2 For an analysis of migration from South of Italy to the North, see for example Fofi, 1975.
3 D. Carter (1991) cites the case of an apartment in Turin where 118 Senegalese men were living together.
Italian anthropologist Bruno Riccio argued that the transnational nature of Senegalese migration does not emerge simply from a reaction to the shift of global capitalism (Riccio, 2003). Taking a historical perspective, Riccio highlights how the process of Mouride urbanisation in Senegal after internal migration constitutes an important organizational preamble of transnational migration: “It is by transferring a long-standing commercial economy and some organisational features that developed with internal migration (the dahira, for instance) that Senegalese migrants shaped the contemporary transnational community” (Riccio, 2003). Furthermore, the unique organization and characteristics of the Mouride brotherhood allow the disciples emigrated everywhere in the world to maintain strong ties with the country of origin (Riccio, 2001).

The transnationalism of Senegalese migration encompasses a wide range of different and varied practices. Senegalese transmigrants are involved in and sustain relations that link together both the sending and receiving countries in three main fields: through economic activities (both formal and informal), through the families they left behind and through religion and the Mouride brotherhood.

On formal and informal work: transnational activities

For many Senegalese migrants, transnational migration means engaging in economic transactions across international boundaries. Trade seems to be the preferred activity of Senegalese migrants, sometimes initiated in Dakar’s Sandaga market and then expanded over national borders.

In Italy, Senegalese migrants are involved in trade at all levels, both formally and informally. Street peddling, quite diffuse during seasonal migration in the eighties and nineties in the big cities and on Italian beaches, is still practiced above all by newcomers to Italy who are waiting for more stable and more lucrative jobs. In addition to peddlers, migrants work both as licensed traders and informal traders in the markets of the big cities, selling Senegalese goods (like handicrafts and jewellery) and more Western goods (such as shoes and handbags). Senegalese migrants also run small businesses, usually little African markets (often linked with phone centres) where migrants can find all manner of Senegalese commodities (newspapers, CD, DVDs, etc), as well as the ingredients to cook typical Senegalese meals. The owners of these markets restock their goods during frequent returns to Senegal, in order to guarantee their clients (almost exclusively Senegalese and African) all the products they need that would be difficult to find in an Italian supermarket.

The two dimensions of formality and informality are not entirely opposite or clearly separated, but tend to overlap and coexist. Some licensed traders that we met during our research have, in addition to their formal trade activity in Italy, informal import-export businesses: some transport goods to Senegal on behalf of migrants in Italy; others buy products in Italy that they ship home and resell in Senegal. Sometimes trade activities involve a presence in more then one nation-state: Fatima, for example, spends her life between four countries. She lives almost half the year in Italy selling clothing to other migrants. She buys this clothing in the U.S., where she spends another part of the year working as a hairdresser with her sisters. Her husband is in Saudi Arabia, and she occasionally goes to visit him there, taking her merchandise with her to sell to her husband’s immigrant social circle. During the summer, returns to Senegal to sell clothes purchased in Europe and the U.S. and also to her three daughters.

Families left-behind

As the case of Fatima illustrates, one of the reasons for Senegalese migrants’ frequent returns to Senegal is to visit their families left behind: wives, husbands, children, but also parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, cousins and all the members of the extended family.
Family is an important field in which migrants maintain transnational ties, both through these periodic visits, and through remittances: families left behind are the principal beneficiaries of the money earned by migrants. It is just this emphasis on family that makes the Senegalese migrant a special envoy of the whole family, who has received a duty from his social group and he has a consequent sense of responsibility towards them (Castagnone et al., 2006). A migrant is often considered as an investment for the entire family in Senegal: most families hope to have a migrant abroad (Riccio, 2001) in order to have this redistribution of the money earned by his job and to improve their conditions of life.

Compared to other immigrant groups, a startling number of Senegalese migrants opt to forgo family reunification, choosing instead to leave family members behind. Many migrants point to the economic motives for this decision. Families in Senegal tend to be large, sometimes comprising several wives and many children. Migrants calculate that their wages wouldn’t be enough for a large family to live on in Italy, where the cost of living is much higher than in Senegal. Other reasons are more nuanced, involving worries about value systems and potentially corrupting influences.

The Mouride brotherhood

The religious organisation of the Mouride brotherhood is very important in maintaining transnational ties as well as transnational identity, providing transmigrants with spiritual and ideological points of reference.

*Mouridiyya* is one of the main Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal⁴, originated in the late nineteenth century as a collective response of the Wolof people of north-western Senegal to changes brought about French conquest. The organisational structure of the *Tariqa* (brotherhood) then provided an alternative authority system for those who had suffered from the collapse of the old Wolof states (Cruise O’Brien, 1971).

The core of Mouride morality and organisation is represented by the relationship between the marabout or serigne (the saint and guide) and the talibe (disciple)⁵. For a disciple, even in the migration context, the relationship with and blessing of his marabout is fundamental to the success of the migrant's enterprise. This relationship is perpetuated also through the periodic visits of the marabout to the migration context, that have a symbolic, spiritual and an organisational importance⁶, through the periodic returns of disciples for the annual celebrations (like Gran Magal in the city of Touba) and through the remittances of talibe.

Solely through the remittances of disciples, Touba, the holy city of Mouridism (where the founder of the order, Cheick Amadou Bamba, has his revelation) has become the second major city of Senegal, where Mourides have constructed the largest mosque in sub-Saharan Africa. The city of Touba is one of the principle sending contexts for migration towards Italy, and also an important receiving context of investments (Riccio, 2004).

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⁴ The two other principal brotherhoods through which the Sufi form of Islam spread to Senegal were the Qadiriyya, founded in Baghdad in the twelfth century, and the Tijaniyya, which originated in Morocco in the eighteenth (Cruise O’Brien, 1971). There is also another, smaller brotherhood, the Layenne, in which most disciples belong to the Lebou ethnic group (Piga, 2003).

⁵ Although it is an asymmetric relationship, there is reciprocity: the former is a spiritual guide who guarantees grace or blessings (*baraka*) and, through his economic and political power, also provides the latter with help on practical matters; the talibe obeys and works for the marabout and his service is considered to be like prayer (Copans 1980; Cruise O’Brien 1971; A.B. Diop 1981). Such an ideology of work has been key to the success of Mouride migration abroad (Schmidt di Friedberg 1984).

⁶ The marabout gives his blessing to the disciples, reinforcing his tie with the brotherhood, and collects the offerings of his talibes.
Relying upon relations of personal dependence and a deeply rooted organisational tradition, the Mouride brotherhood offers a training and solidarity system well adapted to situations of change and crisis (Riccio, 2004).

With its culture of emigration as a training experience, the Mouride brotherhood's vertical (marabout-talibe) and horizontal (among Mouride disciples) ties have been readily reproduced within transnational networks. Such organisational features have helped migrants to organise business dealings, and to engage in mobility between and temporary settlement in the host countries (Riccio, 2004). Mouride dahiras, the urban organisation of the brotherhood, are created in every migrant context. These dahiras provide a space for prayer and assembly and reinforce the social and cultural cohesion of the disciples.

In Italy there is a Mouride dahira in almost every city in which Senegalese migrants reside.

2) The role of food within the process of identity construction among Senegalese migrants in Italian society

In Senegal food is considered to be an element of pride in Senegalese culture, as well as identification, and its preparation and consumption play a fundamental role in regulating social relations within Senegalese society. As the Senegalese writer Aminata Sow Fall (2002) recalls, in a book entirely dedicated to the dietary customs of her country and their significance, the preparation of tasty tie bou jenn, mafè, yassa poulet and bissap is an art. “This culinary art is the result of a process instilled into women from childhood, like all the other cultural components that shape women according to the ideal representation that society has created for them, and their role as mothers nourishing their children.”

The food-mother association and the close relationship between these two elements is highly interiorized in Senegalese society. The Senegalese singer Youssou N’Dour (2004) has dedicated a book to his mother’s cooking, evoking the atmosphere, pace and flavour of a childhood in Africa. It tells of the markets, and the endless rituals performed by the women to prepare the food, and celebrates the image of the family gathered around the shared dish, and the flavours of dishes that evoke motherly love. Often far from his country for concerts, Youssou talks about his mother Sokhna, who is able to transform every day into a celebration, thanks to her wonderful tie bou jenn, the traditional Senegalese dish made of rice and fish.

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7 With desertification, drought and subsequent urbanisation, Mouridism 'invented' new ways to carry on the marabout-talibe relationship within the urban environment. The dahira, the circle where all disciples of a marabout go to pray and discuss religious matters, developed as an adaptive answer to the problems that disciples had to face after the internal migration to the cities. In the new urban setting, the dahira has taken over the functions of the rural daara, assuming the same aims (M.C. Diop 1981).

8 In recent years, a real point of reference was created for Senegalese Muride (and non-Muride) migrants in Bovezzo, a little village near Brescia in the North of Italy, in the form of the Residence Prealpino. The Residence Prealpino is a hostel taken over by several hundred immigrants, mostly Senegalese men. The Residence not only offered housing, but also converted several rooms, apartments and garages into restaurants selling Senegalese food or shops full of African clothes, music, videos and beauty products. There was also a mosque, to be used for prayer and for the frequent visits of marabouts. The substandard conditions of the building, the overcrowding, the unlicensed commercial activity, but above all the continuous protests against the migrants from the Italian residents and the Lega Nord party and the accusations of illegal activities such as drug sales, led the municipality of Bovezzo to close down the Residence in June of 2008, evicting all its residents.
Habitual consumption is what makes dishes become ‘traditional’, and while on the one hand these dishes satisfy people’s tastes, which are constructed and modelled around daily habits, on a symbolic level they become identity markers (Aime, 2008). *Dugub sunu coosan*, the Senegalese say – “Millet is our tradition”, but the most popular dish, and for this reason held to be traditional, is the aforementioned *tie bou jenn*, made of rice and fish. The ‘traditional’ nature of this dish is the result of a process of construction and invention of the identity of the dish (Papa, 2002), which ignores the fact that the rice used to make it is mostly imported from South East Asia.

The native aspects are therefore the traditions regarding the consumption of food (rather than the foodstuffs themselves), and dietary habits, which are interiorized by the social actors, structuring the relationships between the members of the group and constructing the identity of the group itself (Medina, 2001). It is therefore comprehensible that dietary habits and above all the choice of foods, which as M. Douglas recalls (1979), “is linked to satisfying the body’s needs, but also to a great extent those of society”, represent an explicit tool that migrants can use to recreate their identity in the migration context (Medina, 2001). Let’s try to understand how identity is constructed and shaped among Senegalese immigrants in Italy, and in what way Senegalese food and its consumption become “identity markers”.

Like a mother feeding her children: the role of Senegalese food in the migration context of Italy

In Senegal, like elsewhere, food often becomes a tool for highlighting the differences between groups, cultures and social strata (Bourdieu, 2001). Samielli (2003) shows how between two groups of Senegalese vendors at the market in Antignano in Italy the same jokey relations arise as happens between these groups in the homeland: “A Toucouleur never forgets to remind a Wolof that in a different period he would have been his slave; while Toucouleurs are mocked for their legendary voracity before a dish of *tiéré* (a sort of cous cous)”.

Identity construction always occurs in relation to otherness (Remotti, 2001), as the aforementioned case shows. This case also reminds us that there are multiple differences among transmigrants (of race, area of origin, religion, caste, etc). These differences are not perceived by the short-sighted Italian society, where immigration continues to be regarded as a unitary phenomenon with given characteristics, not as a composite, plural process (Colombo, Sciortino, 2002). In the case of Africa, even the most marked differences, such as country of origin, tend to be ignored, with the most common stereotype image being that of the African/Moroccan, without work and coming to Italy to be a street vendor (usually called *Vu’ Cumprà*, that is literally “do you want to buy?”).

“Those who come to Italy from Senegal are simply Senegalese for the Italians, but each Senegalese person belongs to a certain ethnic group, and comes from a particular region (with their own history, language, religion and personal background), which strongly conditions their life choices” (Campus et.al., 1992). So how does the sentiment of identity emerge in this migration context? How

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9 The reason for the popularity of rice in Senegal and its widespread consumption lies in the colonial era, when the French transformed Senegal into one enormous peanut plantation. A few years after colonization Senegal was exporting 16,000 tons of peanuts a year, and in the 1930s over half of the country’s farmlands were turned over to peanuts. Local subsistence farming became increasingly difficult due to the lack of available land. The French compensated for this by importing excess rice from their colonies in Indochina. This is how rice became the national dish of Senegal. In the 30s and 40s Indochinese rice was imported at knockdown prices, and kilo of peanuts in their shells was worth more than a kilo of rice. Local farmers thus gradually abandoned traditional crops like millet and sorghum in favour of peanuts, which however caused soil quality to deteriorate, leading to gradual desertification. It has been calculated that if each person in Senegal gave up rice once a week, Senegal would save more than 24 billion CFA a year in imports. Now, a century after the arrival of the first shipload of Indochinese rice, it is hard to turn back the clock (Aime, 2008).
is the collective Senegalese identity experienced and how is it forged in Italian society, generally unwilling to acknowledge differences? Can we talk about a Senegalese “ethnic” identity?

First and foremost, as the Italian anthropologist Remotti (2001) comments, “Identity is about decisions. […] There is no such thing as identity, just different ways of organizing the concept of identity. In other words, identity is always in some way ‘constructed’ or ‘invented’”.

Remotti also underlines how in this process of construction, otherness plays a vital role, namely the “others” that identity construction generates: dialogue, exchange, comparison and communication with this otherness are essential when it comes to acknowledging the ‘formative’, not just additional or oppositive role, of otherness. Identity should be viewed as a relational category that depends on the dialectical relationship between an “us” and a “them”, by means of ongoing dynamics of negotiation of meaning between migrants and native Italians: “The migrants construct and experience their collective identity in relation to their perception of the Italian identity and culture, the social situation and their role within it, constantly addressing the stereotypes and classifications that the dominant society imposes on them” (Capello, 2003).

The sentiment of identity among Senegalese immigrants therefore feeds on the representations and classifications created within the host society: one example comes from the blindness of the native population to the differences between the immigrants themselves. Let’s see how this works. These differences, that, as we have seen in the various ways of existing as a transmigrant, influence their agency, point up the impossibility of describing Senegalese immigrants as an “ethnic group”: the Senegalese showed a more disaggregated configuration than the ‘ethnic group’ of sociological representations (Riccio, 2001). Some of the distinguishing factors to take into account when analysing Senegalese immigration include ethnic group, religion, regional origin, urban or rural provenance and caste (Schmidt di Friedberg, 1992). These are also the variables that prevent us from talking about a Senegalese “ethnic identity”, with particular reference to the ideal variety of ethnic identity as defined by C. Tullio Altan (1995), in which ethos, understood as a symbolic entity, viewed by various peoples as a part of their identity and a principle of social aggregation, is the result of five essential components in its make-up. These are epos, the symbolic transfiguration of historic memory as a celebration of a shared past; ethos – the ‘sacralization’ of the set of norms and institutions, of both religious and civil origin, which are at the base of the creation and regulation of the group’s social relations; logos, which is used to perform social communications; genos, the symbolic transfiguration of family relationships and genealogy, as well as dynastic relations; and lastly topos, the symbolic image of the motherland – the country viewed as a value in terms of generating its people and its products of nature, and as a source of aesthetic images and emotional attachment.

Let us apply this model to the analysis of Senegalese migrants to see which conditions can be fulfilled. The existence of a shared past justifying the creation of a common history can be deemed to valid for the people of Senegal if we limit ourselves to considering the history of colonization, first by the Arabs and then by the Europeans, with the glorification of the figure of Lat Dior, hero of the Senegalese resistance against the toubab invaders. If we go further back in time, however, we can see how important the great kingdoms, including Wolof, Serer and Tekrur, were for the population, above all in terms of distinguishing between the various ethnic groups which still exist: Wolof, the main ethnic group in Senegal and when it comes to immigration, but also Serer, Fulani, Tacruri, Diola, Mandingo and Bassari. When it comes to ethos, and religion in particular, we cannot by any means talk about homogeneity: on the contrary the situation is highly variegated. As well as the various Sufi brotherhoods we also find both Christians and animist religions (especially in the Casamance region, mainly inhabited by the Diola ethnic group). The same can be said of logos, as each ethnic group corresponds to a different language, though the most widespread language is
Wolof, and is also true of genos, given the lack of a common ancestor that the origin of the Senegalese people could be traced to, due to the presence of different kingdoms and different ethnic groups.

The concept of topos deserves to be addressed separately, because, according to the meaning attributed to the term by C. Tullio Altan, it appears to be the only condition fulfilled in the creation of the Senegalese collective identity. Although provenance from different contexts, for example urban or rural, is another difference between Senegalese immigrants, the idea of Senegal as a *motherland* where one’s loved ones and responsibilities have been left, and as the country of origin where all the “brothers” come from, appears to be the most important unifying factor: “today we can observe that this sense of belonging, intended as ‘belonging to the state of Senegal’, is highly interiorized by most of the population” (Schmidt di Friedberg, 1992).

This is the main point. We cannot talk about a Senegalese ethnic identity, because the historic and cultural background of the migrants is characterized by a series of internal differences, invisible to the eyes of the Italian observers. These however tend to narrow among the migrants themselves, in favour of a broader Senegalese identity connected to the concept of Senegal as a nation: “co-nationals tend to overcome religious and ethnic differences in a foreign country” (Riccio, 2001). In the process of constructing this collective identity the migrants therefore also use the classifications imposed by the otherness represented by the host society, appropriating the simplifications created by the host society.

Senegal as *motherland* therefore becomes the common, most important reference in the process of forming and defining a collective Senegalese identity in the migration context. And like children nourished by their mother, for all the Senegalese “brothers” involved in migration it becomes vital to be nourished by their ‘mother’, by means of the food supplied by her, which represents a strong connection to her. As happens in Senegal, also in the migration context the food – mother connection applies, with food (with its evocative power) becoming both a venue and a space for memories (Filippa, 2005) and an identity marker, the consumption of which strengthens the internal cohesion of the group.

And this very consumption of the same Senegalese food from the same motherland enables Senegalese migrants to overcome internal differences and make way for a broader vision of identity. Eating a *tie bous jenn* and drinking a *bissap* together fosters the creation of a sense of belonging to a Senegalese community in a broader sense.

### 3) The polyvalent role of Senegalese food in the “Experienced identity” and “displayed process” of identity construction

For Senegalese transmigrants, the consumption of Senegalese food and drink in their homes, in the street, in Senegalese restaurants or African markets becomes an “identity marker”, creating and reinforcing so-called “experienced identity” in everyday life. Food also plays a symbolic role in the “displayed” process of identity construction (Fabietti, 1998): during particular important religious events and festivities, like Gran Magal (the annual celebration of the beginning of Bamba’s exile), where the Senegalese and Mouride identity is expressed on a collective level, the consumption of ritual meals plays a crucial role in maintaining the social and cultural cohesion of the Mouride brotherhood and Senegalese community abroad.

Eating is central in human activity not only because it is frequent, repetitive and necessary, but also because early on it becomes a sphere of some choice (Mintz, 2004). Furthermore, it is not only the
choice of food that represents a symbolic way to underlight the own belonging, but also the foodways and the rituals of consumption (Secondulfo, 2004). The cultural meaning that food has already, become stronger and it is amplified through these rituals (in particular the collective and communitarian ones): thanks to their repetitiveness and impact on the sense of belonging, put together a unique cultural representation food and foodways. The result is a powerful ritual of self-identification and social cohesion (Douglas, 1984).

Furthermore, for Senegalese migrants food has a polyvalent role, not only because it contributes to form the Senegalese identity and to maintain strong ties with the motherland, but that it also plays a key role in maintaining kin, social and cultural ties brought from other places, in re-defying new relationships inside and outside the group, and in creating new economic and cultural configurations.

Eating Chee bou jenn and drinking bissap:  Senegalese food in the “experienced identity” in everyday life

As Calvo underlined (1989), in the migration context the immigrant group’s efforts to reconstruct the supply infrastructure required by its foodway ensure that its own dietary culture is at least partly preserved. It is therefore easy to see why Senegalese food shops (often associated with phone centres) become focal points for the community, offering all the typical Senegalese products and ingredients needed to make traditional Senegalese dishes. These shops, for example, sell dried karkade, which is used to make the classic refreshing drink bissap; the cani extremely spicy chilli peppers, smoked fish, baby aubergines and the famous Touba coffee, a blend of coffee and aromatic spices, some of which are held to be an energizing tonic in traditional Senegalese medicine.

These African shops represent a real point of reference for Senegalese migrants, for both those who have just arrived, and for those who have been here for many years. They are also a venue for information exchange, enabling new arrivals to obtain help and support from more experienced immigrants, and the latter to receive news on the situation in Senegal.

“My shop is a very important point of reference for my co-nationals, to talk, to help each other with Senegalese solidarity […]. So even those who have just arrived come here to drink a coffee, our coffee, or a bissap, and at the same time can talk with their brothers, and feel at home…”  Mamadou, 14/6/2007

It would be all but unthinkable for the owner of an African shop or phone centre not to offer his guests or clients a glass of cool bissap or a cup of strong, steaming Touba coffee. Having a bissap or Touba coffee and a chat with co-nationals represents an important everyday ritual for many Senegalese immigrants, and while on one hand this ritual helps to reinforce the identity sentiment, the highly evocative power of food (Filippa, 2004) also helps immigrants “feel at home” in two ways: firstly thanks to the flavour of the bissap, and secondly, due to the sight and presence of food from the motherland. But there is more to it than that.

All of these shops are run by Murids: a clear sign of belonging to the brotherhood is the presence of a photo of the marabout dominating the shop from on high, often alongside one of Amadu Bamba, the founder of the brotherhood: these serve not only to reiterate the bond of identity with Senegal and the tariqa, but also to invite the blessing of the spiritual leader on the workplace, work being a key part of Murid ethics. The shops however also represent genuine meeting points for the Senegalese, independently of religious creed: while most of those who frequent these popular shops are Murids, I have also met many Senegalese of other denominations, from Tidjanes to Catholics and those who simply describe themselves as Muslims, and do not belong to any brotherhood.
This fact would appear to confirm the theory that collective action is based on the self-representation of the identity in terms of the motherland rather than religion (Guolo, 2001): the typical Senegalese ‘solidarity’ and spirit of national cohesion prevails over religious denomination. Tijdanes, Catholics and Muslims meet up in Murid African shops on a daily basis, to buy “their” food, the same food from the motherland Senegal, which nourishes all the Senegalese ‘brothers’. In this sense food is a unifying element, the consumption of which strengthens a broad sense of Senegalese identity, as we have already said, and overcomes internal differences.

Senegalese food and the relationship with other immigrant groups: the case of Moroccans

The African Market is not only frequented by Senegalese migrants, but also by other immigrant groups, especially from Africa, who can find there some ingredients for their typical dishes, but also exchange information at different levels. In this case, Senegalese food also plays a central role in the construction of syncretic identity for other immigrant groups. Let’s see how this process works, referring in particular to the relationship with Moroccan migrants: there have been and there still are some old prejudices and stereotypes among these two groups, a sort of racism, that has often conditioned their relationship.

At lunch time, in these little African market and phone centres it is possible to find also the tie bou jenn, cooked by women. Most of the people that buy tie bou jenn and eat it there are Senegalese, but they are not the only ones. During my field research, I saw a lot of Moroccan migrants eating tie bou jenn in the African market - phone centers, even if they can easily find a Moroccan cous cous or tajinn in some Moroccan shop around the area. I was actually surprised, and I asked Mohammed, the Moroccan, why he preferred to eat tie bou jenn and if he liked it. He answered me, laughing and sure that Mustafa, the Senegalese owner, was hearing: “It is awful, awful! I do not like it, I’m just hungry… It is normal that it is awful, it is Senegalese! Our cous-cous, that is really good! It has nothing to do with this thing… You can’t say that it is good, can you? It is normal, as I said: Morocco is much more beautiful than Senegal and the food is excellent, while Senegal can’t compete with us!” Mohammed, 4/7/2008

And after finishing that portion, Mohammed bought immediately another tie bou jenn, continuing saying the same things and making fun among both the Senegalese and the Moroccan in the market. This is an emblematic case of the importance of food in the migration context. Even though they are constructed around the stereotypes and cultural representations that each group holds of the other, these jokey relationships underline the presence and creation of a cultural boundary; yet at the same time, through food, they cross this boundary (Douglas, 1994). For the Senegalese, the boundary is crossed with the offer of food, or rather the fact of never denying food to anyone, which, as we will see, represents a powerful stance in social relations and the group’s internal and external relationships. The Moroccans, on the other hand, approach the Other (the Senegalese), whom they often stigmatize in terms of the classic stereotypes, by getting to know them, forging relations of various kinds, and then sampling their culture, contributing to the construction of their own syncretic identity.

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10 This is what my Senegalese interviewers told me several times.
11 These cooks can be the African shop owner’s wife or the Senegalese women called “les informales”. We will talk about them in the next paragraph.
Cooking at home, selling in the street: Senegalese women between *teranga*, traditional role and new cultural scenarios

As we have just seen, the polyvalent role of food contributes to the creation of new relationships outside the Senegalese group. We also have to consider that from a gender perspective, for Senegalese women, food is not only about feeding their men and families, but is also a means for gaining social and economic power, reflecting new economic and cultural configurations.

The migratory experience often rearticulates patterns and codes of behavior that already exist in the migrant’s home culture, and also offers opportunities for new kinds of practices, traditions, and family dynamics to develop (Gasparetti, Hannaford, 2008). As we have seen before, also in the migration context the association food-mother is reproduced, not only in a methaforic way (with the symbolic role of Senegalese food coming from the *motherland* that nourishes all the Senegalese “brothers”), but also in the concrete reality, where often women are in charge of the care of house, children and cooking. Women are the link with the *motherland*: through them Senegalese food is prepared, cooked and finally ready for all the “Senegalese brothers”. Their role is fundamental, and in some way they represent the “condicio sine qua non” for the process of identification through food for Senegalese migrants: they physically transform Senegalese food that comes directly from the *motherland* into the national cooked food, *tie bou jenn* (and the other dishes).\(^\text{12}\)

At home, in Senegal as well in the migration context, the importance of the preparation of a good *tie bou jenn*, *mafe* or *yassa* it also linked with the Senegalese value of *teranga*. *Teranga* is often translated as hospitality, but its implications stretch beyond our notion of that word. The principle of *teranga* is to open your doors to any guest who may enter, to feed him, house him, and treat him as family for as long as he may stay. The host expects no gift from guests, no direct contribution to the household expenses or workload. The belief is that a mother who opens her home to the children of others ensures that her children will find welcome wherever they go. A Wolof proverb says that a guest is a king, and the Senegalese believe it is the guest who honours the host with his or her visit. (Gasparetti, Hannaford, 2008). Treating a guest well is a great source of pride for Senegalese women and men alike, and the best way to welcome the guest and ensure him well permanence is through food.

> “If we have a guest, we prepare him the best *tie bou jenn*, choosing the best fish and vegetables. And when we eat all together the common dishes with the hands, everybody will try to leave the best part of the fish and of the vegetables for him, taking care of him. This is also Senegalese *teranga*.”
> Amin, 7/5/2008

The refusal of food is considered a strong offence, in particular towards the women that lovingly prepared it. During my fieldwork, many times it happened to me, in some Senegalese house, to be welcome with a *tie bou jenn* at any time of the day. It was impossible for me to refuse this offer of food as I would clearly have offended all the family.

The relationship between food and women (and mother) in the migration context is not just related to the sphere of house and family. If this role of Senegalese woman as mother nourishing her children is the result of the ideal representation of woman that society has created for her (as Aminata Sow Fall (2002) argues), it can also happen that women can exploit this cultural representation to their own advantage, strategizing their migration process to change their personal and collective conditions. In fact, in the migration context, food can also represent a means to gain

\(^{12}\) As my interviewers told me, it is very rare that men cook at home, unless they are only men. This is why these informal women that cook at home and sell in the street are very common in the migration context.
social and economic power: women can cook at home and then sell the food in the street during the open market in Porta Palazzo district.\(^{13}\)

In this way, they can gain social and economic power in a double sense. Firstly, women can acquire their own autonomy, both in terms of money and social relations outside the house. Secondly, they not only maintain the respect of all the Senegalese community, continuing to play the same role they are expected to play by the Senegalese society (the mother who cooks and nourishes her children), but they are even more respected and appreciated. In some ways, they guarantee the constant presence of Senegalese food and dishes even in the market: thanks to them, it is easy and quickly to find everyday, at lunch time, a prepared tie bou jenn to eat in the street with the other “brothers”, taking a break from work.

These women are called with the French name “les informales”, because they sell food in an informal way in the street, often provoking the irritation of formal ownership of little Senegalese restaurant, that have to pay taxes to sell food. At lunch time, they can go around between the little Senegalese shops or they can be sit in the corner of the main square. Before they arrive, this corner is full of Senegalese waiting for them to eat.

It is very interesting to underline that they pay five euros for a plat of tie bou jenn, mafe or yassa (it depends on what “les informales” have cooked that day), even if they can choose from a wide range of different cheaper food: a peace of pizza for example (that is often eaten also in Senegal) can cost no more than two-three euros. This seems to confirm the thesis argued by Bourdieu (2001): food preferences, and consequent food habits, are determined by the characteristics of the social conditions, rather than by the willingness to pay the food. Choosing to eat Senegalese food with co-nationals and sold by co-nationals, even if it is more expensive, is a specific choice with different meanings. It is a way to confirm the Senegalese identity in the project of self-constructions (Lupton, 1996); it is another opportunity to evocate the memory of the common origin and the common motherland and at the same time to distinguish from the host culture (Bilotta, 2004); finally it is a way to reinforce, through the consumption of “their” food, the sense of belonging to the Senegalese community.

Refusing Senegalese food: different meanings

As different studies show (Filippa, 2001; Aime, 2008), also the refusal of food is an important symbolic way to create and form the identity (Pace, 2008) in the migration context. Individuals or groups may draw on new notions about appropriate feeding, offering and sharing relationships

\(^{13}\) Porta Palazzo is a district in Turin which in the Italian media and public discourse is regarded as the district that symbolises immigration in the city (together with San Salvario). There have been various studies carried out on this district, highlighting its deep-seated social, cultural, relational and identity-related characteristics, which prove inextricably intertwined with the economic and commercial aspects. Indeed Porta Palazzo is many things: a public meeting area, a market place, a venue for exchange and consumption, a spatial reference in terms of identity and a mnemonic signifier for links with the homeland. The heart of the neighbourhood is the daily market, which sells food, clothing and household items, and from 1835 (when it was established) to the present, there has been a succession of vendors, initially hailing from Piedmont, then from Veneto, Friuli, Calabria, Sicily, Morocco, China, Nigeria and Romania. Piazza della Repubblica actually plays host to a number of different markets: alongside the big official market, there are numerous informal-type markets, some of which are illegal (Moroccans selling mint, bread and plastic shoppers, groups of vendors of telephone cards, and street sellers of pirate CDs of Arab music, pornographic videos, etc.). All of these activities have profoundly marked the area, introducing complex new social and economic dynamics and shaping the urban landscape. It has also been underlined how these activities have played a decisive role in the process of revitalizing business in the area, despite the heated social conflict, which is echoed in forceful media output strongly focused on questions of security and illegal activities in the district (Castagnone, Gasparetti 2008).
involving food and drink, and about the appropriate elements and structure of eating and drinking events, to alter relationships within the migrant group, in particularly between generations.

Madame Diallo has a little Senegalese restaurant in San Salvario district, where she sells all the Senegalese dishes, in particular to the co-nationals. She has five daughters: four were born in Senegal and the last one, Yacine, was born and grew up mostly in Italy. She is the most “westernalized” daughter: she speaks in Italian, even when her mother talks to her in wolof, she never dresses with Senegalese dresses and she doesn’t like Senegalese food.

“I don’t like tie bou jenn, nor mafe… I eat it sometimes, when mom brings it home in the evening… Well, if I have no choice I can eat it, but I do prefer Italian pasta… It is so good!! And why do we have to eat tie bou jenn? We are in Italy, aren’t we? My mother doesn’t understand… I am Italian as well, I was born here, I like being here and I like the food, this one..” Yacine, 5/6/2008

Yacine is thirteen years old and she belongs to the second generation of migrants. She is in adolescence and is continuously subjected to processes of negotiation with the two cultural systems in which she is contemporary involved: the Senegalese one (the family) and the Italian one (the society where she lives). The choice of food represent a strong identity marker: Senegalese food, for her, is completely deprived of those symbolic meanings projected on it by the previous generation (Secondulfo, 2004). By refusing to eat a tie bou jenn (or preferring to eat something else), she can express not only her identity, but also her mental and cultural distance from the first generation, that is her parents (Filippa, 2001).

It is important to stress that it is not only the refusal to take food that can have a particular meaning in the migration context (as we have already seen about the kinship relations), but also the refusal to feed someone can be a strong symbolic action.

The restaurant of Madame Diallo is very little, but it represents a meeting point for Senegalese migrants in Turin, in particular on Friday, after prayer in the mosque. During the last months, her clientele has decreased significantly: her business is not good and she is now thinking about leaving the activity. She explained me the reason why: she have noticed that a lot of young Senegalese pushers started to come in her restaurant to sell drug inside during the lunch. They do it to be more hidden and not in the middle of the street, to avoid the risk being stopped by the police. She chased them away, denying them to come back.

“I don’t care about the loss in terms of money on my business: if I will continue in this bad way, I will sell everything and go to Senegal. What I really care about is what these young people are doing. It is a shame! I know them… Once I also phoned their mothers to tell them the truth about their sons […] When I see them, I feel the same as if they were my children: I told them to stop it, to think about what they are doing… I had no results… So, I decided to deny them the access to my restaurant: I don’t want to have anything to do with them, and I don’t want to feed them, they are a shame to my country…” Diallo, 6/7/2008

The words of Madame Diallo let us understand the key-role of food in maintaining or, as in this case, creating division within the Senegalese community. The metaphoric imagine of the mother that nourishes her children comes again, and this time it is embodied in a mother (Madame Diallo) who decides to punish her children (I feel the same as if they were my children) refusing them the food. “I don’t want to feed them, they are a shame to my country”: in the migration context, if the consumption of Senegalese food (coming from the motherland to which all the Senegalese migrants refer in the process of construction of identity) is a strong identity marker, the fact to deny this same food is a tentative to prevent this process, because they are a shame to the country, and for this
reason they don’t deserve to be identified as “Senegalese brothers”. Consequently, they don’t deserve to be nourished by Senegalese food. At the same time, Madame Diallo has clearly expressed her own position through food.

The displayed identity: the Grand Magal, the ritual meal and the holy water

As previously mentioned, the sense of belonging to the Senegalese community is reinforced during the processes of construction of the so-called “displayed identity”. The Italian anthropologist Fabietti (1998) defines this as a form of identity that is voluntarily and explicitly manifested in particular contexts, for example during religious events and festivities, which are celebrated on a collective level.

One of the most important festivities for the entire Senegalese community, and the Mouride community in particular, is the Grand Magal, the annual celebration of the beginning of Amadou Bamba’s exile, which takes place every year in the holy city of Touba14. A lot of migrants make a pilgrimage back to Senegal, and in each *dahira* created in the cities where Senegalese migrants reside, a parallel Magal is organised for those unable to attend it in Senegal.

This event is very important for the Senegalese abroad: it represents a key opportunity to express and display the unconscious feeling of belonging experienced in everyday life on a collective level, together with all their Senegalese ‘brothers’ and within the community (Gasparetti, 2005).

On that day it is fundamental to re-create the space of Touba, the holy city where everybody would like to be at that moment, in particular to receive the *baraka* (blessing) from the marabout who has travelled from Senegal15. As Carter (1994) describes, in Turin Touba is re-created in the room where the Grand Magal takes place “by placing photographs of the Serin […], drinking tea and turning the tea cup three times before handing it to the next person, eating Senegalese food (“We eat in the African way, all together from the same pan”), and extending hospitality to others”.

Eating together is a central activity during the Grand Magal: the ritual allows the community to celebrate and reinforce the Senegalese identity and the Senegalese values of solidarity and reciprocity. The ritual meal is represented by *tie bou jenn*: again, the relationship between food, identity and memory (Lupton, 1996) is fundamental, because symbolically *this* dish (the most popular dish in Senegal) represents the important link with the *motherland*, where everybody, at least that day, would like to be. As we can see, in this process the method of consumption also plays a crucial role (Secondulfo, 2004): eating in the Senegalese way from the same pan and preparing tea according to the Senegalese ritual and tradition are important practices “to feel at home”, and more specifically, to help migrants feel as if they were in Touba.

“During the Grand Magal here in Turin, we pray, because it is a day for praying… And we eat and we feed everybody, because on that day, everybody must be happy, and must eat together… Because it is open to everyone wants to participate, even Tijiane, or Layenne… And the most important

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14 It is very important to understand the meaning of the holy city for Mourides: it is a particular place and “must be an example for the rest of the world. It is the Mecca for West Africa, all good things must converge on Touba” (Riccio, 1999). Touba symbolises Bamba on earth: Amadou Bamba is often called Serign Touba by Mourides. Furthermore, Touba is in the process of becoming the second city of Senegal and, in general, an important economic and financial centre: it is an important receiving context both of international remittances of migrants abroad and of an internal flow of investments and people. (Riccio, 2000). The great mosque at Touba is often considered a sign of the disciples’ economic devotion (Carter, 1994).

15 Marabouts usually travel from Senegal during both Grand Magal and other festivities. These visits are very important to keep transnational Mouridism alive from both the organisational and spiritual points of view. Money is indeed collected by the marabout but he also provides followers with blessings and advice (Riccio, 2001).
moment is when the marabout gives his blessing, the baraka, through the water that we drink...”
Modji, 5/7/2005

As Modji says, everybody must be fed, because everybody must be happy and in peace. The offer of food to anyone is not only a way to maintain and promote the cohesion of the group, overcoming internal differences (as we have seen before), but also a way to put Ahmadu Bamba’s teaching into practice.¹⁶

But the pivotal element in the recreation of Touba in the migration context is the holy water that has received the *Baraka* (blessing) of the marabout. The *Baraka* represents the immaterial power of God transmitted to the Saint, Ahmadou Bamba, and to his family. It is the “vehicle of Mouridism” (Bava, 2002): it allows the talibé to keep the potency of Touba, and to use it even individually and far from Touba itself. During the Grand Magal, the marabout usually transfers his *Baraka* onto the water, which then becomes the “holy water” that everybody must drink in order to receive the blessing:

“*Baraka is something that comes from the marabout: he prays on a glass of water, then he drinks it and passes it to us. We must drink that water, the holy water, to catch the Baraka. We can also take a bottle and put the water inside, so we can conserve the water and the Baraka, to use it whenever we need to*”. Lamine, 6/8/2005

As Bava pointed out, the force transmitted by the *Baraka* (transferred onto the water) connects all the Senegalese involved in the diaspora all over the world, helping to reinforce their sense of identity and belonging to the Senegalese community.¹⁷ Thus, drinking the holy water reaffirms the bond with, and the identification between the sacred place (Touba), the Saint (Amadou Bamba, as represented by other important members of the M’backe family) and the transnational community of Mourides (Ebin 1996), enabling the Senegalese “to feel at home” abroad (Riccio, 2001).

¹⁶ “Touba is all about giving... You must give particularly to those who don’t have anything. This makes you equal to the other. Only God is superior. Giving and respect are always for God.” (Senegalese migrant, in Carter, 1994).
¹⁷ Furthermore, this process testifies to the Mourides’ ability to sanctify space through ritual: Touba is recreated through rituals that temporarily sanctify the given space without the need to create another new centre (Riccio, 2003). As Metcalf (1996) suggests, ritual, sanctioned practices create “Muslim space”, which thus does not require any legally claimed territory or formally consecrated or architecturally specific space.
Conclusion

When building and re-defining their identity, Senegalese migrants in Italy also take account of the classifications and simplifications imposed by the ‘Other’ - represented by the host society, which sees them as “all the same”. Thus, internal differences are overcome, and Senegal as the motherland becomes the common, most important reference in the process of forming and defining a collective Senegalese identity in the migration context. In this process, Senegalese food represents a vital link with the motherland, nourishing all the Senegalese ‘brothers’ abroad. Eating a tie bou jenn together reinforces this broader sense of belonging and strengthens the internal cohesion of the group.

Senegalese food can be found in the African shops run by co-nationals, where Senegalese women can source all the ingredients to make the “typical” dish tie bou jenn (and not only that). Tie bou jenn, the most popular dish in Senegal, is not only good to eat, but also “good to think”, as Levi-Strauss (1966) would say: the cultural meaning that is constructed in Senegal acquires even greater importance in the migration context, thanks also to the rituals that accompany the consumption of food, both in everyday life and during important religious events like Grand Magal, as we have seen.

Senegalese women embody the metaphoric image of the mother (and of the motherland) feeding her children, also due to the ideal representation of woman constructed by Senegalese society. Women provide the nourishment for all Senegalese brothers, ensuring the cohesion and identification processes of the group, both at home (relying on the Senegalese value of teranga) and in the street, where they often sell tie bou jenn. In this last case, food can represent a way to gain social and economic power: women can lay claim to this cultural representation to their own advantage, strategizing their migration processes to change their personal and collective status.

This is just one example of the multiple roles of Senegalese food in the migration context, where it can acquire different meanings according to the different consumption situations. Food can represent a venue and space for memories, with its evocative power enabling Senegalese migrants to “feel at home” when abroad. It also plays a central role in the construction of syncretic identity for Senegalese migrants belonging to other immigrant groups (especially from Africa), contributing to the creation of new relationships outside the group.

The refusal of food can also have different meanings, and can represent, through foodways, the potential for deliberate statements of continuity or change. It can be a manifestation of identity: the example of the young Yacine shows how food can be a means to express conflict and change, in particular between different generations. And refusing to feed someone can have a strong impact in terms creating divisions within the group. For Madame Diallo, denying her tie bou jenn to the Senegalese pushers is a clear expression of her exclusion from that part of the group, the group which is “dirtying the name of the real honest Senegalese community,” to which she feels she belongs and for which she cooks everyday. And by cooking for the Senegalese migrants who meet daily in her restaurant, she contributes, through her tie bou jenn, to strengthening the cohesion and collective identity of the Senegalese abroad.

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