

**Haalpulaar Migrants' Home Connections:  
Travel and Communication Circuits**

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## **Haalpulaar Migrants' Home Connections: Travel and Communication Circuits**

The transnational linkages of Senegal River Valley villages to the outside world are growing global due to the existence of very engaged village diasporas in Europe and North America. The large majority of the villages in the Senegal River Valley are connected with village diasporas in different places in Africa (Dakar, Libreville, Ponte Noire) in Europe (France, Belgium and Italy), and in the United States. This chapter examines the various ways these Haalpulaar<sup>1</sup> diasporas around the world continue to maintain strong relations of solidarity with their rural communities through constant transnational practices.

The Haalpulaar are generally involved in a circular type of migration and even those who brought their families to their host countries continue to keep home in mind. The majority of Haalpulaar are therefore engaged in transnational practices that bring together their host countries and communities of origin. Although the practices of money transfer are well studied, there are a number of social remittances and migrant networks' interventions that are not very well known. .

The goal of this paper is to examine the evolution of the ways in which Haalpulaar migrants in Dakar and abroad maintained connection with the people they left behind. I will point out the revolution in communication technologies and the way it dramatically changes the relation that Haalpulaar have with their families in the Senegal River Valley villages and small towns. I will argue that the Haalpulaar villages have all become "remotely global" in the sense Piot (1999) applied this notion in the case of Kabre communities. The Haalpulaar villages are all connected to the outside world through their small diasporas established in African, European and North American cities. The flows of people, money, information, images and material goods in both directions have a lasting impact on the social life of these villages. The paper is divided in two sections. The first section examines the connections between the Senegal River Valley, Dakar, and the Haalpulaar migrants in America or Europe. The creation of business ventures connecting the three places and the constant travelling between the capital city and the Senegal River valley villages for a host of reasons are particularly analyzed. The second section focuses on the transnational practices of communication between Migrants in America and Europe and their country of origin. The changing nature and content of the communications flows, as we will see, is related to the progressive revolution of the technologies of communication and their rapid penetration to remotely located areas in Africa.

### **Connections of Haalpulaar migrants in Dakar with their rural homes**

Every day hundreds of people take buses, minivans and small cars from the Haalpulaar villages to Dakar for various reasons (to pay a visit to relatives, to attend a marriage, to pursue studies, to be treated as a patient, to look for a job, to take a train or an airplane to foreign countries). In the bus station in Dakar or Pikine, hundreds of Haalpulaar travellers come every morning to board a

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<sup>1</sup> The Haalpulaar are the sedentary Fulani group living in the border areas between Senegal and Mauritania called the Senegal River Valley. They are Muslims with a very rigid social hierarchy reminiscent of the Indian cast system. For their important role on the dissemination of Islam and the Tijaniyya Sufi order see David Robinson: *The holy war of Umar Tal: the Western Sudan in the mid-nineteenth century.* (Oxford Studies in African Affairs.) xv, 434PP. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985.

mini bus or *sept (7) places* (car with 7 seats) to go back to their rural homes. The Haalpulaar in Dakar are connected to their rural homes through frequent travel.

There is a continuous flow of people between Dakar and the Senegal River Valley villages. The majority of first generation migrants in Dakar go back regularly to visit parents. There are also annual caravans organized by migrants to celebrate *the Maouloud*<sup>2</sup>, the prophet Mohamed birthday, to attend *Ziarras*<sup>3</sup> for local religious saints, or to spend *Tabaski*<sup>4</sup> or *Korite*<sup>5</sup> with their families. People also travel to their villages during life cycle events such as funerals, marriages or naming ceremonies.

With the increasing number of means of transportation, the Senegalese capital has become relatively close to the Senegal River Valley villages. Dakar is about 700 Km from Thilogne in the middle Valley and it takes to the minivans about 8 to 9 hours-drive to join the two places. The theoretical separation of cities and villages in Africa does not reflect the fluidity of exchanges and the complex ways the two spaces enmesh into each other through travel and connections. There are people like Magueye who restlessly travel between Dakar and their rural home. There are hundreds of Magueyes who are neither villagers nor urbanites, their vital space is in-between the two spaces.

Magueye, 50, with three wives and 14 children, travels more than 20 times a year between Dakar where he lives with his family and Thilogne, his village where part of his extended family is still living. I know Magueye personally as he is my neighbor in Golera, a neighborhood of Thilogne. I travelled several times with him between Dakar and Thilogne in both directions. The last time I travelled with him was in the summer of 2008. He was always looking for an opportunity to travel without paying his ticket. Whenever I come to Dakar, he would come to see me and ask me not to leave him in Dakar. I avoided a number of times to travel with him by telling him I was not travelling straight to Thilogne. I usually stopped in St-Louis for few days before continuing to Thilogne. But I did travel with him more frequently from Thilogne to Dakar. I asked Magueye why he was traveling restlessly between the two places. He replied that he is “a people’s person.” “People need me in most of the social events that take place in Thilogne or among Thilognese in Dakar”, he continued. It is true that he is often invited by Torobbe or Sebbe families to perform as a Neeño during marriage celebrations<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Maouloud* is a religious feast that celebrates the birth of the Prophet Mohamed. Two to three days prior to the night of celebration thousands of minivans and buses leave Dakar to go to Tivaoune, Kaolack, Medina Gounass, Touba and a record number of villages in the Senegal River Valley where it has become a tradition to celebrate the Maouloud with villagers living in Dakar. The villagers in Dakar rent a minivan or bus and spend three to four days in their rural homes.

<sup>3</sup> Ziarra is a visit that pays respect to religious leaders and saints. In Senegal the followers of the Islamic Sufi orders visit regularly their Cheikh or religious guide. They can also do a visit to the tombs of the venerated founders or highly regarded cheikh in their Sufi order known as Tariqa.

<sup>4</sup> Tabaski is the religious celebration of Abraham’s sacrifice. It is called in Arabic Eid Al Kabir.

<sup>5</sup> Korite is the religious feast celebrating the end of Ramadan, the holy month in which Muslims fast from dawn to dusk.

<sup>6</sup> The Haalpulaar social structure is constructed around three major hierarchical social groups themselves divided into subgroups. At the top of the social hierarchy are the Rimbe or nobles composed of several endogamic subgroups which are the Torobbe, the Sebbe, the Subalbe, and the Jawambe. In the middle of the social hierarchy are the Neenbe who are composed of manual workers such the Waylube or Blacksmiths, the Lawbe or Woodworkers, the Sakeebe or leather workers, the Mabube or weavers, and praise singers who are known as

Magueye is from the social corporation of pottery makers that belongs to the larger NeeñBe social category that includes all social-professional groups and the praise singers. The NeeñBe play an important social function during family ceremonies. They usually speak on behalf of the noble families. They are intermediaries between the grooms' and brides' families when they negotiate engagement and marriage. Magueye goes back to his village whenever there is a family ceremony. He goes to present his condolences whenever there is a death in his family or his neighborhood. He accompanies returnees from Europe, America or Central Africa when they go from Dakar to Thilogne. Magueye also serves as a guide for the returnees in Dakar. He helps them make their gift purchases in the Dakar market by bargaining on their behalf. The travel back and forth between Thilogne in Dakar is a business for Magueye who earns most of his revenues through participating as a Neeño in family ceremonies and guiding returning migrants both in Dakar and in Thilogne.

Between 1998 and 2003, Magueye ran a money transfer business in collaboration with Bathie, his noble friend in New York City. Magueye developed a close relationship with Bathie after the latter came back from the US to celebrate his marriage in 1990. Magueye guided Bathie in Dakar and helped him buy clothes for his fiancée and his close relatives and went with him to visit them in Dakar. He advised him about the appropriate gift for each relative they visited. He travelled with him back to Thilogne and helped to organize his marriage ceremony. To thank him for his time and his service, Bathie gave 200.000 CFA franc (\$ 350) and two locally fashionable boubous to Magueye. Bathie's wife gave him 40.000 CFA Franc (\$ 60) and one boubou. Moreover, Magueye received smaller gift from Bathie's extended family, in total about 350.000 CFA Franc (\$ 500).

After he went back to New York, Bathie, who was a trader at that time, started to explore the money transfer business. He contacted Magueye and asked him to serve as his local operator in Dakar. He opened a bank account in a local bank and made a "procuration" arrangement with Magueye so that the latter could withdraw money from his bank account. Bathie operates wire transfers of large sums of money in New York. As his partner in Dakar where the remittance are sent, Magueye was paying out to recipients of remittances he received from Bathie in a daily basis.

They opened a small office in Grand Yoff, a popular neighborhood in Dakar where Magueye received the fax that Bathie sent every day containing the list of money transfer recipients. The office had a large desk and three chairs, a fax machine and two telephone booths. The office was used to pay out the money transfers as well as a "telecentre" (callshop) which operate as public telephones booth. The office attracted a lot of Haalpulaar migrants in Dakar and became a "grand place" where people came to share information and discuss with other people from their villages.

The transfer money business in Dakar was also serving Thilogne and its surrounding, especially the Agnam villages. Magueye hired Amadou as a middleman between Dakar and Thilogne.

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Awlube or griots. The Neenbe on top of their usual manual works have also the social function of serving as social intermediaries between the Rimbe families. At the bottom of the social hierarchy are the Maccube who are descendent of slaves.

Amadou would carry large sums of money to Thilogne and spend two days to pay out to recipients of money transfers before coming back to Dakar where he would spend some three days before returning in another mission. During the four years that the transfer business existed Amadou was literally in between Thilogne and Dakar. He was known by mini vans, 7 places, and bus drivers, shopkeepers, and restaurant owners along the road. He was also used both by villagers and migrants in Dakar as a carrier of letters, oral messages, information and goods between the two places.

The money transfer business collapsed in 2003 because there was no formal accounting system following the operations in Dakar and New York. Bathie was blaming Magueye for the failure of the business. He claimed that Magueye adopted a lifestyle that was beyond his means. He married a third wife, finished constructing his house in Dakar and was engaged in outrageous type of consumption. Magueye's account for the reason of the bankruptcy of the transfer business was that Bathie stopped paying him and Amadou the usual monthly commissions. He started to withdraw money to pay himself and Amadou. For Magueye the reason of the collapse was that Bathie was arrested in New York and fined 50,000 \$ for selling counterfeit shoes. In order to pay his fine and get out of prison he sacrificed the transfer business.

What one learns from this story is the interconnectedness between international destinations, the Senegalese capital and the Senegal River Valley villages. There are hundreds of business ventures involving Haalpulaar immigrants in different destinations and the people they left back home. Although trust is a major problem as the money transfer business mentioned above seems to indicate, it does not prevent Haalpulaar immigrants in global cities to be involved in a variety of business ventures that exploit the opportunities related to the home connections. Diagne, 48 years old, operates an informal freight forwarding business allowing Haalpulaar immigrants who want to send home machinery, electronic, cars, and extra luggage to do so by paying less than freight businesses in French airports or harbors. Ba, 40 years old, operates a money transfer business between Paris, Dakar and Thilogne. Contrary to Bathie's money transfer, Ba relies exclusively on family members. His business partner in Dakar is his father, a retired accountant who worked for a local bank in Dakar. In Thilogne, Ba collaborates with his brother who is running a modern bakery belonging to the former. Both Diagne's and Ba's business ventures are working perfectly well.

Coming back to the connections between Dakar and the Senegal River Valley villages, one can come to the conclusion that Magueye's case is an extreme one. Few people frequently travel between their village of origin and the Senegalese capital. It is difficult to beat Magueye's record of 20 trips per year between Thilogne and Dakar. However, there are thousands of people involved in this back and forth travel between Dakar and the Senegal River villages. Penda, 54 years old, lives in Dakar with her family. She owns a clothes shop in a local market in Parcelles Assainies. Penda goes to Thilogne about five times a year. She is very influential in her extended family because she attends all family ceremonies taking place in Dakar or in Thilogne. In 2007, she travelled three times to Thilogne in one month. She came first for a marriage of her sister's daughter and two weeks after going back to Dakar, she was informed that her uncle fell seriously ill; so she came back to see him. She left again after three days for Dakar; five days later her uncle passed away. She returned to Thilogne with a group of relatives to present her

condolences. They rented a minivan with 18 seats and travelled by night. After five days Penda went back to Dakar.

When I talked to Penda about these frequent travels to the village, she acknowledged that they are tiring but she added that she had no choice but to go back to her rural home for funerals and marriages. For her it is unthinkable to stay in Dakar when there is a happy or unhappy social event in her extended family. She explains:

“When my son and my two daughters were getting married, my relatives from both my mother and father side came from Fouta to attend. When I lost my son in Italy in 2003, my relatives from Thilogne rented two minivans to come to present their condolences. What I am doing is just paying back the support and kindness of my relatives to me and to my family. I just ask God to continue to give me the strength and the means to accomplish these family obligations. When you have your relatives or neighbors in grief because they lost their loved ones, it is important to be seen and to share their pain.”(Interview with Penda in Parcelles Assainies Unité 24, July 2008).

Most Haalpulaar men and women in Dakar share Penda’s view on how important it is to come back home during the funerals of their extended family members. As she explains villagers also come to Dakar to present condolences to their family members living in the city.

Another category of people’s movement back and forth between their villages and the city are students. In many villages of the Senegal River villages there are only elementary and middle schools. Therefore, after finishing school, students have to go Matam, St-Louis or Dakar to continue their studies. During the academic year, the villages are empty because of the absence of most of the youth. They return at the end of the academic year for the summer holidays. They animate village life by organizing soccer competitions between neighborhoods of the same village or between villages. They also organize sketches and cultural performances and participate in educating the local population in health and environmental issues.

### **Transnational Practices of Communication**

In the relatively short history of their migration to France, maintaining connection with home has always been very important to the Haalpulaar. In particular, the worldwide technological revolution of the past two decades in the realm of telecommunications has enabled Haalpulaar migrants to benefit from the rapid global circulation of information, goods, images and ideas. Having had to rely on letters during the 1960s and 70s as the only way to communicate with family and friends back in the Senegal River Valley, Haalpulaar migrants in the 1990s and 2000s stated that the increasing availability of cellular phones in the West and at home was dramatically changing the frequency and nature of communication between the nodes of their migrant networks. The cheaper rates for cellular and satellite phones and cards meant that a migrant in Paris could call home on a regular basis.

One of the obvious ways in which transnational migrants maintain connections with home is through the establishment of communication channels between themselves and the people they left in their home communities (Rouse 1991, p: 13, Clifford 1997, p: 246-247). The accessibility of cell phones in even the most remote areas of the globe make contacting one’s relatives and

friends at home an integral part of the migration experience. Such means of communication have linked individuals and groups in post-industrial metropolises with counterparts in remote localities that once quenched the thirsty imaginations of anthropologists in self-deluded search of the pristinely exotic. One personal story will bring home the way in which the cellphones have revolutionized the way we communicate across long distances.

“During the summer of 2003, I was travelling with my family between Dakar, the capital of Senegal, and Thilogne, my hometown situated in the Senegal River valley. My wife, who had arrived from France a week earlier, was equipped with a cell phone she purchased in Dakar that she used to inform her mother, who lives in Compiègne, a small city north of Paris, of our plans to travel overland to my village. We left Dakar in the early hours of the morning hoping to arrive in Thilogne before sunset. We did not know, however, that the road on which we were travelling was cut by heavy rains, about 25 km away from my hometown. Our arrival at the point where the road was cut left us at a loss of what to do, especially as my wife realized that she had no credit on her cell phone with which to call and alert my family of our situation. After about half an hour, my wife’s cell started ringing. It was my mother in law calling from the comfort of her living room in Compiègne informing us of an announcement she heard on a Senegalese radio station, to which migrants in France can listen to via satellite, about the condition of the road from Dakar to Thilogne. Having told her we were standing right at the point at which the road was cut, we asked her to call my parents in Thilogne and have them call my wife’s phone. Soon after, the phone rang, and in half an hour a neighbor of my parents had come in his car to pick us up.”<sup>7</sup>

What do we learn from this story? It is clear that the new technologies, in this case satellite radios and cell phones, have created very complex (in some cases absurd) circuits of communication in which distance is not always the most relevant factor determining the ability to contact someone living in another village or town. Our proximity to Thilogne did not obviate the need for the intermediary role played by my mother-in-law in France between us and my parents. In demonstrating on the one hand the closeness with which members of the Diaspora can participate in events back home, and on the other the relative scarcity of access to means of communication that still exists in rural Senegal, this experience struck me in its reminder both of how far we have come and how far we still have to go in connecting the Senegal River valley with the rest of the world.

During my fieldwork in New York, Cincinnati, Memphis, and in France, I witnessed firsthand the daily phone calls of my informants. Besides husbands and fathers calling their wives and children, I was interested in phone calls to local actors in Haalpulaar films widely watched by the Haalpulaar migrants as one of the preferred entertainment after work. The conversation of Issa with a local actor whom he never met but who has become a close friend visiting his family back home at his request is a case in point on how long distance phone calls are central to not only maintaining connections with family members but also of establishing new relations and new friendships across vast distances.

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<sup>7</sup> This is the author’s experience in August 2003.

In their living room on the third floor in an old building in Fulton Street, Brooklyn New York, Issa, 48 years, greeted me with a nod and continued his telephone conversation with one of the rising stars of Haalpulaar movies: Yacine.

“Are you with my sister? Did they treat you well?”

“Give the telephone to my sister. I want to talk to her”.

“Aminata, go and get from Pape, the shopkeeper, everything you need for the *kottungu*, I will send the money at the end of the week.” Did you buy the sheep for the dinner? Make sure everything is well done. You know Yacine is really a great friend.”

After half an hour of discussion, Issa started passing the telephone around asking his friends to talk to the local actress who came to visit his home in Thilogne. Sidy, one of Issa’s friend was bursting from time to time: “Thiom! walay ka daanaan” - “You have what none of your age group members have.”

After the telephone was passed around, Issa asked me to talk to Yacine. Although I did not know her, I politely took the telephone and did like everybody else:

“Allo, this is Abdoulaye, a friend of Issa! Is it right that you are in Thilogne?”

“Yes I am in your very welcoming village. Everybody is nice to me” she replied.

Not knowing what else to say I continued:

“I like your movies. Every time I watch them I want to go back home.”

“Thank you, I appreciate your support. I really cannot pay my fans in America. People are calling me, sending money and many of you when you come back would do everything to come and see me.” She said.

“Thank you, I am passing the telephone to Issa.” I replied.

Issa continued the conversation for another 10 minutes before hanging the telephone and starting to greet me properly. He has never met Yacine in person but he watched all her movies and started to call her in 2002. Since then they have become good friends and he calls her very frequently to see how she is doing. Issa admitted to me that he and many others Haalpulaar migrants send her money because they want to support her knowing that she does not get much from her movies. The irony is that Yacine is better known in the Diaspora where her movies are circulating and valued by nostalgic and homesick Haalpulaar migrants than in Senegal where until recently the locally made movies circulated in limited circles. It is Haalpulaar migrants who are returning home who are bringing these movies back to their rural homes and introducing them to the local audience.

The telephone encounter between Issa and Yacine is a metaphor of the increasing frequency and volume of the communication between Haalpulaar in the diaspora and their home communities. The telephone has become a central object in the Haalpulaar migrants' lives. It has become the most important tool in achieving the goal of keeping home in mind. It is through telephone conversations that the transnational social spaces are realized (Linda Bash 1994, Appadurai 1996, and Vertovec 2009) . Through telephone conversation Haalpulaar migrants remind villagers of their presence during both happy and unhappy events, congratulating new couples, comforting people facing illness, presenting condolences to people who lost their loved ones, consulting marabouts and traditional healers for illness and misfortune, carrying their social obligations towards their families and communities while living and working in global cities.

In 2006, while doing my research in Thilogne, I attended a funeral in the Ndongo compound. Siley, the oldest son of the deceased could not talk to people who were coming to present their condolences because he was busy on the phone. He asked his uncle to meet people and accept their condolences on his behalf. Siley's cell phone was ringing constantly. People were calling from around the world to present their condolences. He counted more than a hundred calls the first day and another 60 to 70 calls the second day. He said he is really humbled that people in the Diaspora remembered him and his family during this difficult time. He said he talked to people he had not seen and heard for 30 years. Most of the callers sent money to the family to take care of the funeral expenses. This practice has become a norm when parents left in the Senegal River Valley would make sure their sons and daughters living abroad are informed about the death of close relatives, neighbors and friends so that they call to present their condolences and send money to support the grieving family. Also in the diaspora news of death circulate rapidly between Haalpulaar around the world and migrants who lost a loved one would receive numerous phone calls from around their community diaspora community as Siley did in his home village.

Other moments of intensive communication between migrants and their families in the Senegalese River Valley are the celebration of religious holidays. It is often the people left behind who initiate the communication and ask for help to face the important expenses of religious celebrations. They ask for money to pay fabric and tailors to make sure that everyone in the household has a new cloth for the occasion. Women ask for money to bring their jewelry to blacksmiths to make them shining. Families also need cash to pay the contributions to age-group clubs which use the money to entertain their members. And also for the end of Ramadan (*Julde Korka*) and the fest of Abraham's sacrifice (Eid Adha). During those occasions migrants call their parents, uncles and aunts to ask forgiveness and get benedictions.

The celebration of the Prophet Mohammad's birthday known as Maoloud stands out as a moment of intense communication between the Haalpulaar migrants and their home communities. Haalpulaar migrants from Thilogne are organized around neighborhood associations which sponsor the religious activities related to the Maoloud. They send money to buy a cow that would be killed to feed the neighborhood and its guests most of whom came to sing the prophet praise songs, recite Koran, or give sermons during the whole night celebration.

The communications between the Haalpulaar in France and in the United States and the people left in their villages is most often realized via satellite. One of the "hot" commodities used by

Haalpulaar migrants in the United States is the satellite calling cards. The companies that offer satellite communication services have been targeting African immigrants in both Europe and in the United States by designing cards with the map of Africa and pictures related to the continent. 2 Africa, 247 Africa, African Party, African Dream, African Line, Bongo Africa, African Cousin, Afri world, Africa Select, etc. are some of the names given to satellite phone-cards offered by INMARSAT, SATWEST, ITECH TELECOM, GLOBAL PAPA, etc.

Calling cards working via satellite connections are the most frequently used system of communication. Along Fulton Street (Brooklyn) there are several small shops owned by the Haalpulaar and the Fulani Guineans selling calling cards. Also among the Haalpulaar there are migrants who buy calling cards in wholesale and who resell them by going from door to door along the Fulton Street. These sellers are also involved in Haalpulaar movies retail as well as a variety of ethnic products from clothes, shoes to hats and prayers beads. The situation in the United States is very similar to France where Haalpulaar usually buy calling cards from the small retailers living in the "foyers". The "foyer", apart from being a vertical village is also a place of community business where blacksmiths, tailors, haircutters, as well as small venders of ethnic products operate following the rules of African social life with the bargaining, credit and the common social hierarchies based on age, gender and social corporations belonging.

The widespread use of telephone in the communication between migrants and their home villages is a very recent phenomenon. Until the end of the 1980s, there were only few landlines in the villages of the Senegal River Valley. Electricity came in the villages of the Senegal River Valley situated along the national road No2 between 1988 and 2000. At the end of the 1990s thousands of household were hooked to the electricity and telephones networks. The number of landlines was four in the whole village of Thilogne in 1988. The number of landline in the same village jumped to 178 in 2003. For someone like me who had an uncle who served during the 1970s and the early 1980s at the local post office as manager in Thilogne, this development is a big revolution.

I remember the time that the public was at the post office and how people who wanted to place calls to Dakar waited four to six hours without the guarantee that their calls would get through. In the living room of my uncle, we could hear his loud voice: "Allo! Allo Dakar! Allo! Allo Dakar!" After several tries, he would often tell the customers that they needed to come back in the late afternoon or very early in the morning and try again. The village could spend days and sometimes weeks without any telephone signal.

Now times have changed. The great majority of households have electricity and a landline telephone in their compound. However, there is a correlation between the household that have telephone lines and the migration of its members. It is migrants who often made sure their rural houses have a telephone to make the communication with home more frequent. They are the ones who pay the connection fees and who also take care of telephone bills.

Since the beginning of 2000, another revolution is sweeping the Senegal River Valley villages with the invasion of cellular phones. Everybody, young boys and girls, adult men and women, and few old people are walking with their little gadget in their hands, pended in their neck or put in their pockets or handbags. When I debarked in Thilogne in 2008 with an old Nokia, everybody

thought I was joking. They could not believe the university professor I am was so low in self-esteem to carry such an old fashion cellular phone. The youth were carrying very sophisticated cellular phones like blackberries, sidekicks, and cellular phone with two lines. They get their cellular phones from people in the diaspora or from Mauritanian black markets in Kaedi, Rosso and Nouakchott.

One of the common uses of the cell phone is the “bipping” which consists in calling a number and letting it ring only once with the hope that at the other end a husband, a father, a daughter, a wife or friend will call back and therefore take over the costs of communication. Before proceeding to the analysis of what this rapid increase in means and volume of communication between the Haalpulaar and their rural communities means, I want to come back briefly to the long history and evolution of communication between those who were gone and those who remained in the Senegal River Valley.

The methods Haalpulaar migrants have used to communicate with home have gone through various stages, and have depended on the means available to particular migrants in their host communities. Until the end of the 1970s, the letter was the only means of communication that Haalpulaar migrants and their families at home could use to keep in touch. Very often, even postal services could not be relied upon, and letters were carried by people traveling between home villages and cities.

Moussa, 57 years old, arrived in France in 1971. He remembers when the letter was the only way to communicate with his family in the Senegal River Valley. He would enclose the letters with the money he was sending to his parents, siblings and other relatives every month. The content of his letters was composed of greetings, inquiries about people’s health, and instructions on how the money ought to be distributed. Moussa showed me a pile of the letters he received in return from family members and friends, which were often filled with various demands for help with household expenses, home construction, school fees, medical bills and the conducting of family ceremonies.

Some migrants have favoured the sending home of tapes they recorded, both as a means of communication as well as entertainment. In addition, migrants who went back and forth between Senegal and France would make the rounds to compounds where families of fellow migrants resided to record the voices of the wives and kids, which they would play for the absent husband or father upon returning to their host community. Tape recorders served as valuable gifts to fiancés and wives, who used them to entertain friends and guests. By the end of the 1980s, however, video cameras added a whole new dimension to the ties linking the diaspora with home. Nowadays, images of life in the Senegal River Valley are present in the “foyers” of Paris.

A few Haalpulaar migrants are even using Youtube accounts to post videos recorded while they were visiting their villages. This creates the exciting possibility to give migrants from the same village but living in different countries simultaneous access to footage from home, which is made all the sweeter if the footage includes a naming ceremony or marriage. The internet in general plays a role in making easier the longstanding practice by Haalpulaar migrants of sending home edited video footage of their lives in France.

## **The strange path of information flows between global cities and rural homes**

Haalpulaar migrants in Europe and in the United States have never been so far away from home but yet so close. They live at home in the host countries. Haapulaar in France are connected on a daily bases with home through satellite radios and TVs, cell phones, and the internet. In some instances Haapulaar abroad are more informed about what is going on in Dakar than the people who live in remote rural areas. One of the curious things I noted when I was in New York City, Memphis, Cincinnati, and Florence to do my fieldwork, was the piles of calling cards lying next to migrants beds and sofas. When I ask Ali about the cards, he ironically answered by saying that “since we do not have the privilege to be with our wives, the calling cards are a way to be there and to remain connected.” Issa admitted that he was spending at least \$150 a months on calling cards. He said to me: “I call my wife in France and my parents in Senegal. I cannot stay two days without calling to both countries.” The telephone has become the most used medium of communication between migrants in the United States and the people they left behind. The telephone has in many ways redefined the relations that Haalpulaar migrants have with their families and communities in the Senegal River Valley. The men who left their families behind are now able to monitor on a daily bases what is going on in their family life: From afar they discipline kids, dictate decisions to their wives, and negotiate credit with shopkeepers.

At the same time the telephone has facilitated the fluidity of information between the migrants and their home villages. The village’s news does not take long to get to the migrants’ communities abroad. News of death for example can reach family members in France and the United State before it get to family members in Dakar or in some remote areas of the Senegal River Valley, which could be just 50 miles away from the place where the news originated. In the summer of 2002, we followed a fascinating case of how the news of death circulated from a village to the outside world.

“Diey and her cousin were travelling from Thilogne to Ndiafane, a small village next to the Senegal River, where her sister was married to a migrant who was in New York City at that time. They travelled from Thilogne to Galoya by car then they rented a traditional boat to go to Ndiafane. Unfortunately the boat sunk in the middle of the river and none of them knew how to swim. The boat owner was not able to save them. The news of what happened reached Ndiafane and an expedition of young men was able to fetch the bodies in the early evening and Diey’s sister identified her and her cousin. She immediately called her husband in New York City. Her husband called Diey’s brother in Cincinnati who in turn made several phone calls to Dakar to his immediate family members.

People in Thilogne that was just 50 miles away from Ndiafane did not knew what happened until the next morning when they started to receive phone calls from the United States, France and Dakar - places in which the news were circulating from one migrant community to the next through family, neighborhood and friendship networks. Everybody in Thilogne was surprised that they got the news the last.”(Interview with Thiam in Thilogne, August 2002).

This story shows the complexity of how information circulates in an era of globalization. What is remarkable is the fluidity of information originating from home to different diasporic

communities. The lack of fluid communication between rural places in Senegal separated by small distances is also striking. However, the use of cell phones is changing very quickly the way Haalpulaar villages communicate among each other. There is an exponential number of people owning cell phones in the Senegal River Valley making the communication between villages more fluid than in very recent past. Another development worth mentioning here is the appearance of community radios in Pete, Thilogne, Ourosogui and Matam that reach Haalpulaar villages on the other side of the border in Mauritania or Mali and have contributed to fundamentally increase the channels of communication between remote areas and the more accessible areas along the national 2 road to the Senegalese Capital. Now news of birth, marriage or death are publicized through the community radios making it accessible to all listeners.

## **Conclusion**

The anthropology of transnational migration, with its associated global flows of money, images, and ideas, provides a necessary framework for understanding the relations that Haalpulaar migrants maintain with their rural homes. This strength and spontaneity of the connection between migrants and the people they have left behind questions the relevance of the role physical proximity plays in migrant networks. Nowadays, migrants and villagers create and share social spaces and social fields everyday and their relations are not constrained by the physical distance and the presence of political boundaries (Bash and Blanc 1996).

This chapter has demonstrated how travel and the use of new communication technologies have made the connections between Haalpulaar migrants in Dakar and abroad and their rural communities more instantaneous and fluid. The connections between migrants in Dakar and their rural homes were often made possible through restless travel between the two places by a variety of people for variety of reasons. Various business ventures initiated in the Haalpulaar diaspora abroad contribute to the increased mobility between Dakar and the Senegal River Valley villages. The connections between rural and urban areas as depicted in this paper challenge any notion of the two places as separate entities.

The connections between Haalpulaar migrants living abroad and their rural homes are often kept up through daily communications, which paradoxically operate along local-global axes rather than local-local or local-national axes. The result is that migrants living abroad are often better informed of what is going on in their home villages than their family members in Dakar or in other neighboring villages of the Senegal River Valley, as shown by the example of how information about death of Diey and her cousin was circulated.