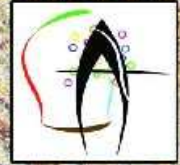




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**إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين**

**“Penetrating the Unseen”: Role of Religion and Spiritual Practices in the Senegalese Boat Migration Process**

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## **Abstract**

The study of migration has been predominantly dominated by the focus on economic causes of migration, yet the role of religion, which has had little attention, is increasingly on the rise with regard to migration. Drawing on empirical research I conducted for an Mphil in Development Studies, this paper delineate and analyses the role of religion, *marabouts* and spiritual practices in the boat migration process amongst Senegalese fisher migrants desperately seeking a foothold in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It is generally assumed that migration is less responsive to variables like religion and ideology than it is about material conditions and standards of living. However, religion occupies a central role in the lives of Senegalese fishers turned boat migrants. Boat migration has had its bearing on the growing appeal of reformist Islamic ideology arising from debates and contestations about whether boat migration should be judged as suicide or martyrdom. Notions of religion and *maraboutage* appeal to the many migrants that undertake the perilous journey of boat migration in my ethnographic study. To the vast majority of the population involved, securing the benediction of the *marabout* is an integral component of the journey that cannot be neglected; such relationships are carefully cultivated and the courage and determination they inspire fascinating. As such, a well-entrenched system of bilateral relations between the religious *marabout* and a well organized religious society has provided a way for boat migration to thrive beyond the simple and often simplistic fixation with material pursuits. I argue that religion and spiritual practices act as a form of social expression, and a vehicle for community building and identity as well as it speaks to the agency of the migrants, with or without material ambitions.

**Key words:** Marabout, maraboutage, gri-gri, sacrifice, fisher migrants, religion, spiritual practices