

*Faire l'aventure*

Excerpt

The conversation began again. A young father recounted his adventures: five days to Nouadhibou via bus, months spent waiting for a boat and ferryman—and finally the pirogue and its forty-seven passengers. Every day he recalled the woman who wept on leaving her children. She'd been inconsolable and drowned the day after the boat departed. He paused to blow his nose on the front of his wool sweater.

“There were other dead, but we couldn't alert the families because we were unsure of their names. But me? I swear to God, I wasn't afraid. First of all, because I have a wife. Second of all, because she gave me a healthy daughter. I thought, ‘Even if I'm dead, I won't lose everything.’”

Someone who knew the story's ending added: “The Almighty didn't want you to stay there. He made you come right back—and you came right back.”

“I stayed seventeen days. I'm not ashamed I came back. I did what any man would've done. I didn't kill, steal, or lie out there. My conscience is clean.”

He scratched the patches of stubble on his cheek. He should be at least twenty, but looked closer to fifteen. Still his eyes were old: two small, expressionless black irises drowned in a battle of eyelashes.

“Seventeen days: that's a lot more than seventeen hours, just to give you an idea. And what's more, out there—in the center—they kept us comfortable, all right. We had three square meals every day. They gave us telephone cards, cigarettes, soap—and not just any soap, this one had a special *aroma*. I was sure I was in Europe every morning thanks to that. One day they put me on an airplane. I thought it was headed for Spain. Before I left I saw there were some islands in Europe. And that Tenerife was closer to Spain than Senegal. But as soon as I noticed how long it took, that's when I started to doubt. I learned for sure not long after because we'd already arrived at Ndar. Well, some people were crying, some saying they wanted to go back: that they'd kill themselves if they weren't allowed to. But the soldiers awaiting us at the airport weren't there for that. They had big bags full of drinks and sandwiches. They gave us some, and tokens to pay for our transportation home.”