



CIEA7 #4:

THE SUFFERING OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES OF/IN AFRICA AND THEIR
CAREGIVERS: NEW MODELS, NEW PRACTICES, NEW ACTORS.

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Failed Migrants in Bamako:

The Mental Pressure of Return

Migration from sub-Saharan Africa to European shores became increasingly difficult and dangerous. Maghreb transit countries return migrants to their southern borders, and member states of the Europe enforced its expulsion policy. In Mali this leads to the frequent arrival of failed migrants, too ashamed to return to their families. Often, these returnees are in need of medical care. Cut off from traditional social networks, they gather in the city.

Since 2005, returnees increasingly engaged in self-help groups. The organisations are offering assistance, first aid and medical care for returnees.

Initiated out of the transnational experience of returned migrants, the work of these organisations answers the needs of failed migrants as an emergent urban social group, and is located within the framework of international health organisations. The paper explores how these organisations operate within the cultural urban framework at Bamako.

Migration, Return, Vulnerability.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In this paper, I will briefly address the overall problem of the return of expelled migrants at Bamako. Then I will take the example of one organisation, the Association Malienne des Expulsés, AME, to show its approach towards forced returnees. I chose the AME, because it is this organisation that has extended experience in the cooperation with transnational partners, and at the same time gets support by the German association medico international and has started a project on mental health care with the French based Medecins du Monde, MDM. After sketching out the central problems for returnees, I will describe the activities of AME to address these, and the cooperation with MDM on mental health, indicating the direction of the program and possible difficulties.

EXPULSION AS A PROBLEMATIC FIELD

Migration from sub-Saharan Africa to European shores became increasingly difficult and dangerous during the last decade. Transit countries like Morocco, Algeria, and Libya return migrants to their southern borders, and member states of the European Union enforced their expulsion policy. In Mali this leads to the frequent arrival of failed migrants, bare of any means.

Figures vary, but in 2007 approximately 1.200 expulsions of Malian citizens from European countries and approximately 420 deportations from different Maghreb countries by air took place¹. From late 2005 to October 2008, 3.417 deportees arrived at the Mali-Mauretania border crossing of Nioro, Mali². About 2.000 deportees are counted annually at the Malian-Algerian border³.

BAMAKO: A WAITING ZONE

Arriving at the Malian borders or the Bamako airport for the returnees means in first instance a difficult situation. Beneath the need for shelter, food, and often also primary medical care, the forced return means first of all a shock for the migrants, and leaves them in a puzzled state. According to members of the AME, about 80 % of the returnees in first instance think about ways to head north again, be it on the "route" or

¹ Figures according to the information of AME, cited in Lecadet 2009: 22.

² According to Malian local authorities, cited in aphda/ame 2009: 55.

³ Information from Clara Lecadet.

with visa and plane. For them, Bamako is a place to gather again the means to depart again, though, in practice, most of them will not be successful.

Being a failed migrant is a strong obstacle to the return to the family. Returnees feel guilty and ashamed returning with empty hands, and often do not even inform their family about their return or, in other cases, do not tell them that they have been returned forcefully. But it is not only the feeling of shame, "la honte", that keeps migrants off their families: often it is the family that rejects the failed migrant, saying that there is no place to stay, or offering but the minimal assistance, a space to sleep and food, but showing clearly its discontent, ignoring, flouting and insulting the returnee. Bamako is also the place of returnees that lost the relationship to their extended family, often staying with friends or on their own in the city, and trying to make their living. So it is the situation on return that forces migrants out on the streets and that nourishes their wish to migrate again. Often failed migrants live in a situation close to social death. Even when migrants can live with their families, their orientation often is dominated by the wish to re-migrate, which seriously blocks their economical and social initiative at Bamako. So many of them spend their days waiting for a chance to find money for the next attempt. Some live waiting over years.

AN ABSENT GOVERNMENT

The Malian government does not offer any kind of assistance to forced returnees. Though Mali has a strong interest in remittances and operates a defensive policy against deportations, support for forced returnees does not exist.

Only on the arrival of charter deportations (mostly from Spain and Libya) the deportees are taken from the airport and gathered in the court of a Civil Protection Office at Sogoninko, a southern quarter of Bamako, but left without any assistance, even water, food or any equipment to stay for the night.

Since October 2008, the EU financed CIGEM project, Centre d'Information et de Gestion des Migrations, started working at Bamako. Among other, government oriented activities, the center tries to coordinate the activities of associations in the field, inviting them to form an umbrella organisation with the assistance of CIGEM, and funding nine associations for activities in the field of reception of forced returnees.

THE EMERGENCE OF SELF ORGANIZATIONS

Since autumn 2005, after mass expulsions from Ceuta and Melilla that got extensive media attention in Europe and Mali, returnees increasingly engaged in self-

help groups as well as political activism. The social forum at Bamako in spring 2006 and a memorial day for the expulsions from Morocco in autumn 2006 offered options to meet on a national level and to establish links to European human rights organisations, mostly from France and Spain, but quickly growing into transnational networks comprising human rights organisations in Europe, the United States, and around the Mediterranean Sea.

At the time being, 63 groups and organisations are registered at the Delegation Générale des Maliens en Extérieur, DGME. The organisations, among them the Association Malienne des Expulsés (AME), are offering reception assistance and first medical care for returnees at Bamako airport and at the Malian-Algerian and Malian-Mauritanian borders, others are more oriented to the reintegration of returnees on the local and regional level, at least one organisation (ARACEM) cares for non-Malian migrants expelled at the Algerian border. Most of the organisations are simply associations that emerged out of the idea to gather those who suffer the same situation, to promote their interests and to assist each other in the reintegration process.

THE ASSOCIATION MALIENNE DES EXPULSÉS

Founded in 1996 by Malian deportees from the Sans Papiers Movement in France and deportees from Angola and different African states, the association came out of the shadow in 2006. Since mid 2007, the AME gets funding by the French human rights organisation Cimade, and since mid 2008 additional funding by the German organisations medico international and Pro Asyl. This allowed improving and extending services, as the reception of expelled persons at Bamako airport and at the Algerian and Mauritanian borders. The AME is the only organisation being at the airport on a daily basis to offer support, shelter and transport to deportees from France, and the only organisation offering the same assistance at Nioro on the Mauritanian border. At Kidal, the AME and other organisations share the activities.

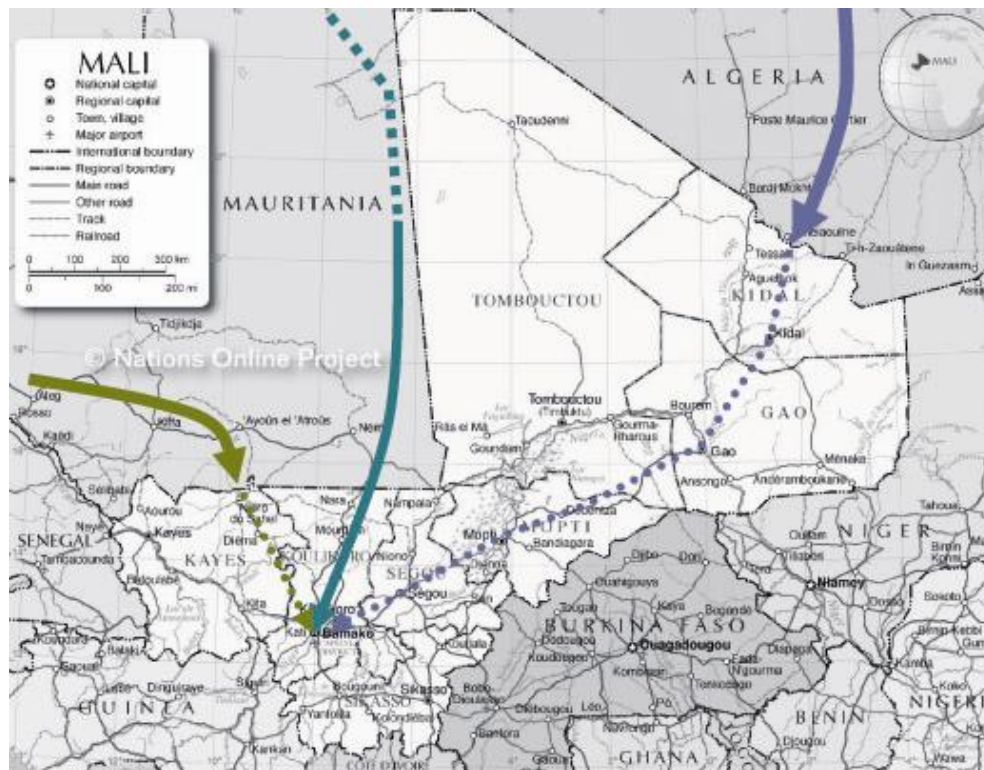


Illustration 1

Members of the AME are frequent guests in Europe and elsewhere, presenting their work and their claims, and at Bamako the AME is hosting cooperation partners, researchers or journalists, thus maintaining close links and exchange with European partners. In both realms, the acquisition of funding and the close exchange with European organisations, the AME has an outstanding performance, compared to most of the other organisations in the field.

HEALTH ISSUES

At a first glance, medical issues do not seem the most important problems of returned migrants. It was the situation at Ceuta and Melilla, where hundreds of migrants were maltreated by Moroccan and Spanish police, and deported to remote places in the desert, which first caused the intervention of *Medecins sans Frontiers* (MDF) to assist these migrants with food, blankets, and first aid. Also, migrants arriving at the Canary Islands or at other European shores get first aid, mostly through the Red Cross or other nongovernmental organisations with a focus on emergency help and medical aid. These activities, frequently covered by media, led to an image of the irregular migrant as a vulnerable person, suffering not persecution and its consequences, but suffering from migration and its hardships itself.

Medico international

So, it is not very surprising that the German organisation medico international started to back financially the work of the AME. Medico takes an emancipative stand critical to European migration policies. Medico is operating a broad, human rights based notion of health, and supports numerous grassroots movements and small organisations in developing countries. Health care often is but one focus within the activities of these organisations, and mostly embedded into a broader rights and assistance oriented approach.

Though medical care is not at the centre of AME's daily work, access to health care is among the basic needs of returnees. Since about a year, health issues are part of the questionnaires for returnees taken by AME, and with the financial aid of medico the AME can pay the continuation of treatments or pharmaceuticals for returnees. Deportees arriving at the northern borders often are in need for first aid, suffering from injuries caused by transport or police treatment, or just being ill and exhausted because of long periods in the desert. In a number of cases a necessary treatment could be realised with the assistance of AME.

Medecins du Monde

While medico is supporting the work of AME in general, the cooperation between AME and Medecins du Monde on mental health for returned migrants clearly indicates a second level of health oriented activities. The project⁴ was financed by a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and European Commission (EC) common initiative on return and reintegration assistance and fostering cooperation between European and African organisations.

Assistance to mental health care is a new field for the AME, and the project started with a number of trainings for the AME staff, sensitizing them to the issue. Though expertise is coming from MDM, who installed a trained psychologist at Bamako to coordinate the project, the idea for cooperation in this field came from AME and derived out of the daily work with returnees. Ousmane Diarra, president of the AME, describes the arrival of some returnees:

“It was us who asked for the project. Because we realised that the deportees, after having made their report at the AME, and often already while making this report, are mentally deranged. They use to come to the office, have tea and talk to the others and you see that this person mentally is not in a proper shape. The returnee only talks about his life in Europe, the 14 or 17 years he spent there, and now he finds himself in terrible conditions in his own country, often having left wife and children in Europe, and

⁴ The projects started in September 2009, and ends in September 2010.

all his goods. Here, he not even knows what to eat the next day, and this deranges him. Furthermore, the family rejects him. Because he had been deported, he has no money, nobody cares for him. The friends will leave him, often the wife demands the divorce, saying: you have been a coward, staying years abroad and I have been waiting for you, and now you return, deported and without any money. All these problems press down on the returnee. That's because we called the MDM, had an extended exchange about this situation, showed them the figures, and they saw that this really is a problem."

As it becomes clear from the statement of Ousmane, the AME is not really prepared to deal with these often deeply disturbed returnees, who suffer from failing their migration goals, often violent experiences during deportation, and finally the shame and sometimes the crude rejection by their families. Having no place to go in Mali, and being blocked from returning to Europe, many of these failed migrants are at limbo, and some really come to the AME office, sitting around, drinking tea, and not knowing where to go.

The project's second phase, initiating in January 2010, aims at identifying persons in need, giving them a broader assistance, improving the reception and transport conditions and, if needed, to direct them towards a therapist. Two therapists at Bamako had been identified as potentially offering an adequate treatment to vulnerable return migrants.

TRANSNATIONAL TRANSFERS?

Assistance to traumatized returnees – does this mean the export of western models of mental illness and healing to Bamako? The mere transfer of western models and categories to the setting in Bamako is not in MDMs interest, as Haddia Diarra, the MDM psychologist conducting the project at Bamako, underlines. From Malian descend herself, she has been working for seven years with irregular Malian migrants at Paris, and knows fairly well the assistants she is training at AME as well as the potential clients. As she describes, already the training has to take into account the social and cultural backgrounds of the future assistants, of which only few read or write fluently. As Haddia puts it, the assistants themselves gave her the tools which she can use for the trainings. As a trained psychologist, she will bring with her the tools of her discipline, but has to adapt these tools to the local situation.

As an example she notes that mental problems in Mali often are linked to the influence of whichcraft, a djinn or other supernatural forces. Forced returnees are often called the "enfants maudits", *battara n'dé* in Bamanan, those who do not have the

benedictions of the family. One of the first steps for Haddia will be to inform about the circumstances of deportation, the violence and hardships, and the fact that deportation is not linked to criminal acts or misbehaviour, but simply the consequence of a migration policy that denies legal stay in receiving countries. It is thus not an image of illness that is posed against the local attitudes against failed migrants, but the evocation of the social and political circumstances that lead to the misery of the returnee. This includes the work with the families and the inhabitants of the villages where the returnees come from.

AT BAMAKO AIRPORT

On the level of the individual concerned, the assistants of the AME will be trained in a better and more sensitive reception, in listening carefully to what returnees tell, and to accompany them. Only in more serious cases returnees will be invited to contact one of the two local therapists that have already been identified. Mamadou Keita, Secretary General of the AME and at the same time the one who attends every night the arrival of flights from Paris, already has a lot of experience with the reception of deportees. French policemen hand over the deportees to a Malian police team for identification, and then Keita picks them up. He explains his role and the work of AME, and one of the first things he tells deportees is that he himself has been deported after having spent 14 years in France. As a proof he uses to show them his French social security card. He then carefully checks the situation of the returnees, if they have family in Bamako, friends, or a place to stay, and offers them transport. When returnees want to go to their family, he offers his assistance, and often he is the first to meet the family, explaining the situation of the returnee to family members and thus easing the arrival of the returnees. Often, he says, it is not only the shame of returnees that stands against a return to the family, but it is the family that rejects the returnee. In these cases, the returnee can spend the next nights at the AME office, where a sleeping room is prepared for such instances. Sometimes, Keita tells, returnees are outrageous and furious at their arrival at the airport, especially, when they suffered violence on their deportation. In these cases Keita tries to calm them down, talk to them, but not always successfully. Sometimes returnees refuse to accept his assistance, and he has to let them go on their own. In all cases, returnees are invited to come to the AME, where someone can look into their case and offer assistance, and where a “témoignage”, a record of the migrant’s experience, is taken.

Keita gives the impression that he is not much in need for a further training on how to receive and accompany forced returnees. The work of the other assistants will

start where his work is done and he returns to the airport. Following up the family situation and stabilizing the returnee so that he can face the new situation will be the main activity for the other assistants at AME.

REINTEGRATION

Two main reasons for traumatising of failed migrants can be identified: the experience of a sometimes violent deportation, together with the breakdown of life routines and expectations linked to the life abroad, and the confrontation with the family after a forced return. As a return to Europe is not within reach (a removal implies a five years re-entry ban, irregular migration is expensive and dangerous), a reintegration of the returnee is the overarching aim of any form of assistance given.

Here, accompaniment and therapy have its limits, because reintegration is almost necessarily linked to a certain economical success of the returnee. A man's position and honour in Mali is closely linked to his ability to feed and care for a family. Migration even raises the expectations and the pressure to contribute to the family's income, as migration, especially to Europe, is linked first of all with the acquisition of relatively high amounts of money. A failed migrant, returning with empty hands, is denied even the status of a proper man. In most cases of my fieldwork the goal of economical reintegration was not matched, and still is a theme that makes men vulnerable and thinking about leaving again.

The AME/MDM project is designed for reception and the period after arrival, but does not include measures for an economical reintegration. Though the project seems to be well designed and answers to a need for socio-psychological assistance, the success might be limited. The AME is well aware about this, knowing that the association's activities focus on reception, not on reintegration, and an extension towards reintegration projects is already planned.

THE URBAN SPACE

Ulf Hannerz once defined the urban space as "unity in diversity and diversity in unity", ascribing among others to the city the quality to bring together persons with the same orientations, needs, or fate.

In this sense, Bamako offers a space for failed migrants to meet, to organise themselves, to help each other and to claim politically for their rights. The mass expulsions of migrants from Morocco to Bamako in 2005 led to their organisation, as

well as deportees from Angola and France found together in 1996 to found the AME. Bamako thus not only offers the social and political space to establish organisations, but constitutes the field of activities as well. Bamako is the place for international exchange and the place to lance political messages and claims, too.

On the other hand, Bamako offers a space for failed migrants to live, if not anonymously, so at least far from the close social control exercised in the village. I met several men, living on their own in small, rented rooms. One returnee, a carpenter, got a job in a furniture shop run by two brothers from Cameroon, and made his wife and children leave the village and live with him in a small flat, close to the shop and far from the family. The model of the stranger which Simmel and others described as condition of western modernity, and which most migrants learnt to know and live abroad, does not fit properly to the social networks at Bamako, but the lifestyle of many failed migrants comes quite close to it. Actually, some migrants described their living conditions with the same word they use to depict their hard life in Europe – the “galère”, drudgery.

Finally, Bamako is the place where the second aspect of Hannerz’ definition, diversity in unity, is found as well. It is the city of Bamako where psychological therapists could be found that can treat returnees in need. Thus the necessary specialisation within medical care is most likely to be found in the capital, not in the village.

Haddia Diarra sees changes in the Malian society. She recognizes a growing discontent with the ways Europe and especially France treats migrants, expelling them forcefully out of the country. In some years, Haddia is convinced, families will treat their returned migrants in a better way, because they will say, “if you do not want our children, we will care for them”. This, too, will be likely to start in the capital, because here information spreads quicker, and the mere number of returnees and their organisations might form a critical mass to introduce such a change.

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