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The deportee in a country where migration is always successful

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Abstract

European policies of closing borders led to a rising number of deportees in Mali. Based on the master narrative of a successful migration history, the deportee is taken personally responsible for having failed. This prevents realising the political reasons for a high number of failed migrants and dealing with the growing difficulties for migration to Europe.

In Mali, migration is seen as part of the career of young men, and conceptualised as circular, ending with a successful return and the life as a respected member in the home community. The European migration management leads to increasing difficulties to realise this migration pathway. Deportees arrive at the borders and the airport, and new migration is increasingly difficult, but the society is not prepared to cope with this new situation.

Failed migrants, among them especially those who had been returned forcefully by European or Maghreb countries, are accused personally of having failed, sometimes are rejected by their families, or feel to ashamed to return to their home town.

Analysing the inability of public discourse to cope with the growing number of failed migrants, this paper addresses among a number of reasons:

- The important notion of success, related to the honour of a person and the name of its family, in Mali.
- The strong view that migration to Europe (compared to the much more frequent migration within the region) is per se successful and a dichotomisation between success and failure of returnees resulting from this view

These discursive elements are strongly encouraged by transnational discourses on migration and development, which also address the successful migrant (and his/her money). This, apart from a difficult economic reintegration, turns the return of failed migrants to Mali into a task almost as difficult as the migration to Europe, and is at the heart of the constant trigger to remigrate again.

The Malian migrant

... is typically male. He is in his early twenties, and has worked on the family field, not yet having established his own household. He may have married before leaving, though, and his wife will live with his family while he goes abroad. Often he goes before marriage, and hopes to earn the money for a decent marriage after return. He usually has some years of schooling, but mostly not too much (which fits to the average of the Malian male population). He might come from the village, or from one of the smaller or bigger towns. His family usually is well established, neither really poor nor rich, migration of young men is a mainstream phenomena in Mali, not the idea of the very poor. Migration is intended to improve the economical situation for the family, as life in Mali is often precarious and marked by stagnation. Social and economical mobility is closely linked to migration. Upper middle class and upper class Malians migrate as well, but usually, as they enjoy better relations, have easier access to visa, base migration on strategic distribution of family members, and thus play on another level. The irregular migrant is heading north, sometimes with the help of human smugglers helping to prevent increasing border controls. As interception increased on the Maghreb borders, many Malians may stay over months and even years put, trying to gather the money and means to cross to Europe. Routes change constantly, as do destinations, though the principal way to Europe still seems to go via Morocco and Spain. In the last years, migration to the Gulf countries increased, as well as to some central African countries, especially Gabon. If a country is destination or mere transit only turns out during the travel. The traditional European destination for Malians has been France, but since about 2000, many migrated to Spain or Italy. Due to the economical crisis, intra-European secondary movements have been frequent. Though some countries, e.g. Spain, run regularization schemes, many Malian migrants stay in irregular situations and have to fear deportations.

The honor and the name

Migration in Mali is a frequent phenomenon, and most migrants go to neighboring countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire. Migration to Europe comprises only about 5 percent of the overall migration in Mali, but is at once much more prestigious and in a sense "the real migration". Soninké, the ethnic group having established the first migration links to France, see themselves as the only true migrants. This is linked to the idea that migration is to earn money, and to become rich. This may be possible in migration destinations in Africa, too, but migration to Europe clearly sets the benchmark (which is now increasingly contested, when migrants e.g. in Spain no longer find jobs or earn less money than in Africa). Another capital which can be accumulated through migration is experience, as migrants back home "have seen the world". But experience alone does not make a migration a success.

In the (European) host country, Malian migrants often stay ten years or longer, trying to save money, and at the same time remitting regularly to their families. This flow of remittance money is a central constitutive link between the migrant and his family, almost even stronger as regular phone calls.

In many popular songs the brave remitting migrant is praised, while some songs also address the son who forgot his family, does neither call nor send money, a performance which is deemed as ungrateful and men who do so are called "enfants maudits", accursed sons. The brave son is assisting his family, and sending money back means much more than pure money. Sending money is a sign of love and respect toward the parents, and helps to augment the honor and the name, *jammu*, of the family. Besides the family's honour, a individual

reputation is linked to the *tógó*, the individual name (see Steuer 2011). Both names, *tógó* and *jammu*, have to be upheld by good behavior as well as economic success. The family as well as the individual lives through the name (Cissé 1971: 157). Honor is less the internalized idea of good behavior, but highly depending on reputation within the neighborhood and social network. Honor and good behavior is object of intense and continuous debate, and has to be defended against all odds. Important in this struggle are the *jeli*, Malian griots or praise singers, who also take part in upholding an image of migration as success, when frequently praising the migration history of persons they are singing for (mostly on social events like marriages, but many songs also have a generalized character and are played on the radios). Honor and reputation are at work within and between families. Within the polygamous family, the social position of a wife is defined by her children, the way they behave, the (economic) success they have and bring into the family. So, family life often is marked by silent, but fierce competition between co-wives, which is transmitted to their children, too. The behavior of a son also adds to the respect his father gains. Remittances, which frequently are send back to the father as head of the family, who redistributes means according to the needs of family members, also help to establish and strengthen the father's position. Or they are send to the mother, or, sometimes, to the spouse. Economic success achieved by a remitting son can be shown by building a new house, dressing better, purchasing consumer goods, and thus adds to the reputation of a family in the neighborhood. Participating in upholding the good name of the family, is important for young men, and is the field where their interests merge with those of other family members. In cases when migration is not successful, this often is concealed by the migrant, either by not contacting the family, or by setting up fake stories or arrangements. In cases when migrants confess to the family back home that they are without money or having hard times, sometimes the family does not believe it, and at least tries to hide it. The strong notion of honor and its close link to economic success does not allow the truth.

As it is difficult for young men to achieve economic success in Mali, and many just muddle through a day to day life and small jobs, the one who migrates is deemed higher as the one who stays behind. This is, even when it is clear that migration is difficult and dangerous, a strong incentive for young men to go abroad, as at home the possibilities to achieve success are very limited. Young men in Mali, even when they work and have a more or less decent life, often talk about going abroad to improve their situation.

The notion of economic success through migration is closely related to the imagined ideal life cycle. A young man only becomes a proper man when he is able to found his own household, to marry, to feed and clothe his wife and children and thus to achieve a certain independence from the father's household. Especially in agriculture, the possibilities for young men to earn or possess 'own' money are very limited. As long as men are living in the father's household, they usually hand over the money they earn. In the village, they often have to ask the head of the household for every franc they need. Migration offers the opportunity to step out of this gerontocratic system, to earn own money, and to decide how much to send back to the family, and thus to gain an own standing as a man. This idea is at the root of many migrations in Mali, but combined with an idea of Europe as "Eldorado" it develops a force on its own, exaggerating the expectations about a successful returnee.

The end of migration is the return as a respected man. Though this return might be postponed several times, or turn out to be a myth, migration in Mali is not aiming at becoming someone abroad, but being someone back home. This relates at the same time to the miserable conditions and hardships Malian migrants are able to endure abroad, and the desire to return as a wealthy man. The social frame of reference is at home, not abroad. This seems to be true as well for Malians in France, which often live in close contacts to each other, and have a number of associations linking them up to the home village. As people told me in a village

near Kayes, the strong links upheld serve at once as a social solidarity network and social control.

This is, to be not misunderstood, the *idea* and *discourse* about migration, painted in black and white, while the reality of standard migration and return shows many nuances between failure and success. Many returnees fail bringing back enough money, or fail with their investments back home, and migration could not always improve the living conditions even for migrants who have been in Europe. Ndione and Lombard (2004), researching the investments made by returnees, state that almost half of the persons interviewed had to say that they either failed entirely or the investments made did not improve the family's situation substantially. Migrants from France often only return after retirement, and even before the economic crisis in Europe many migrants, most of them living under irregular conditions, had difficulties in making their living, let alone sending money back home.

But nonetheless, as far as migrants bring something on their return, they will be welcomed and blessed by their family. Migration is known to be hazardous, and an often dangerous endeavor. As Dougnon (2012) shows, migration is rooted throughout Mali in a traditional semantics of leaving the cultivated space of the village, and going into the wilderness, where you can be injured or even die. Return to the village often means that a migrant has to undergo a purification, because he could bring danger and damage with him, and to ask for the benedictions, either of the head of the village or the head of the family. These ceremonies tend to be routine, as Malians are familiar with benedictions on different occasions, but a refusal might have devastating consequences, as this would be a clear and open rejection.

When migration fails: the way back

The interest to raise family reputation through migration, and to overcome stagnation, combined with the still prevailing image of Europe as a place of wealth and opportunities, leads to an idea of migration (to Europe) which is strongly charged by the expectation to succeed, and it is this idea of wealth and success where individual and family interests converge. Failure is not part of this image and concealed as far as possible.

But, as migration to Europe became increasingly difficult over the past twenty years, a rising number of involuntary returnees go back, or in the case of deportations, are returned to their countries of origin.

Precise figures are not to get, but, according to the Association Malienne des Expulsés, AME, which gets this information from different sources, among them the Malian border police, deportations from France diminished over the last years from about 500 to less than 200 deportees a year. The numbers for Spain are comparable, so most returnees, roughly 2000 a year, come from Maghreb countries, in 2011 with the exceptional number of more than 20.000 returnees from Libya.

The process of forced return can be divided into different steps. Before deportation, many returnees are held in deportation custody, often for a number of weeks. Apart from prisons in Europe, special camps are known e.g. in Libya and in Mauretania, and imprisonment is frequent in Morocco and Algeria. Deportations from Europe are by air, sometimes as charter flights, but often small numbers of deportees are returned on regular flights, accompanied by special police units from the deporting country. Deportations from Maghreb countries usually are processed with busses or trucks, dumping the deportees at the Malian border. From here, it is, especially in the case of Tinzawaten on the Algerian border, a hard and exhausting way

back. The Malian Red Cross has a truck shuttle, which transports every two weeks about 60 returnees from the border to Gao, but often many more are waiting to get away from the desert place, and go on their own.

From Gao it is a 1.500 km trip to Bamako, the Malian capital. Deportees arriving here usually are exhausted, without a cent, often mentally and physically in bad shape. According to ARACEM, an association assisting returnees on this route, one out of twenty dies on this last step.

In Bamako, returnees may be hosted by organizations like ARACEM or AME, or stay with relatives or friends, before returning home. This first arrival is for many returnees a liminal phase: Back from migration, the men have not yet returned home, and many fear or are ashamed to go this last way. Some therefore still are torn between going back and heading north a second or third time, some will stay in Bamako and hide away from their family. This liminality is underlined by the many cases of mentally disturbed return migrants. According to Jean Richard Tienou, a Malian psychologist working in a project for Medecins du Monde, this vulnerability is only partly due to the hardships returnees had to suffer on their return, but often is related to their helplessness to deal with failure and shame.

The family, save haven or hell?

Most of the returnees, though, do return to the family, and the stories vary broadly about their reception. In some cases the returnees were welcomed back home, and family members say they were happy to see them alive. In others, the experiences were mixed. For instance, a migrant is welcomed by his father, which usually would be a signal for the family, but then he was treated by cousins and other people from the village in a way that finally made him leave the village. Other returnees were allowed to come back, but they were given only a place to sleep in the compound and food, and otherwise they were shown that they were not welcome, and they didn't get the benedictions of the father. They, in many cases, also left the family's house again. Yet others didn't dare to tell the truth on their return, and run into problems therefore. A young man now living with friends in Bamako told his family on return that he was on holiday only. His father, proud to welcome his migrant son back home, started to arrange a marriage with the daughter of a rich neighbor, and at a certain point of this procedure (which includes a number of visits and the presentation of kola nuts and a tissue) the young man could not go on without revealing his failure. Instead, he fled the family house and went to Bamako.

Interestingly, failure is defined mostly by the act of return. As I was told frequently, it does not make a difference if someone was returned from say Morocco and never sent back a Franc, or if someone had lived in France and had been remitting reasonable sums of money over years.

It is the return with empty hands which is shameful for the returnee as well as for his family. Usually on return, or even visits back home, a migrant from Europe is heaped with presents and a considerable amount of money, is carefully dressed in European style, and displaying other signs of success (a hip mobile phone, big watch, and so forth). Often, he had announced his arrival date and is picked up at the airport by his family, as well perfectly well dressed. The successful return is a feast, a sheep may be slaughtered, and relatives come for visits. In contrast, the deportee usually is not picked up by his family at the airport (though this may happen, too), his belongings usually fit into a plastic bag, and there are no presents around. In my research, I even came across examples of a warm welcome, and instead of mockery and sneering a broad assistance for the returnee. Karim, who had spent most of his father's fortune by various attempts to cross the Mediterranean, was warmly welcomed after his deportation

from Morocco. His mother gave him two oxen, which he sold to open a small shop in the local town. He was released from paying back his debts. Today he is a well settled man, and respected in the town. But Karim, out of more than twenty deportees in his town, was the only one received in this manner (the biblical parable of the lost son comes to mind). The others had to suffer, and some still do. This is in some cases an effect of the polygam family. Karim's father has one wife only. In families where two or more spouses live in one household, competition between the wives usually does not allow for a release from or even a reduction of the debts, which then will last on the returnee's shoulders for years.

All these stories are not told easily, which adds to the fact that failed migration is something not fitting into the usual discourse on migration. When I had a meeting with a group of deportees in a small town in the south of Mali, everyone told me his migration and deportation story, but, when it came to tell about the return to the family, they all became quiet. After the end of the discussion, when the men were leaving, one returned to me, telling hastily that he has the (for Malian incomes incredible) sum of 4 Million Franc debts (almost 6.000 Euro), and his mother's co-wife insisted that every Franc is paid back, and that his family is giving him a really hard time. This was in 2010, and by then the young man had already lived back home for more than four years.

This experience of being haunted by the proper family is best described by Bemba, a young man I met in Bamako, and one of the few who told freely about his return. He had returned to his family after deportation, and then was mocked constantly by cousins and younger brothers and sisters. They had heard a song about failed migrants in the radio, and they even bought the tape and played the song whenever they met him. He said he was convinced that he had to endure this, just as he had endured the hardships of migration, and over time this would pass. But, as he said, even after two months his family did not stop sneering at him, and so finally he decided to leave the family and better live on his own.

It is failure that is at heart of how a returnee is conceived by his kin. Instead of adding to the family income, a failed migrant comes home with empty hands, one more eater instead of one more (and often the most important) earner. Here, we also meet a highly individualized responsibility for this failure. It often is the migrant who is taken responsible for his failure, often it is suspected that he committed some sort of misbehavior for which he was expelled from Europe. A high number of campaigns to explain the dangers of irregular migration to Malian youth notwithstanding, the difficulties about migration and irregular stay in Europe are not taken into account. And the opinion that a migrant failed is not only central to the family's attitude towards a returnee, but central also to the migrants self perception. Although he knows about the difficulties, he also knows that he is personally taken responsible for failure.

Leaving one's family is a step not easily taken, as it cuts someone off from all social ties, and probably there are different ways to "leave", which can also include moving to another place, most probably the capital Bamako, and not splitting off totally with the family. Leaving is one way to deal with the shameful situation of failed migration. As the example of Karim shows, returnees can stay at home and step by step regain reputation, and take the shadow from the family's name. But often returnees do not see a way out, and either go to other towns in Mali or migrate again. As honor is a question closely linked to economical success, a new attempt to migrate for many is seen again as the only way out.

Failed migration and no development

The past years brought a rising interest in migration and its possible positive effects on development of poorer countries. Regarding Europe and Africa, this renewed discussion is closely linked to European efforts to control and channel migration, preventing in particular so called irregular migrants from going to Europe. In a number of summits, meetings and declarations Europe tried to integrate African governments into a common strategy, in which the notion of development and migration induced development seemed to be a common denominator.

The so called three pillars on which EU-Africa cooperation in migration issues grounds, as described in the “Dakar Strategy”, are organizing legal migration, the fight against irregular migration, and strengthening the synergies between migration and development (Dakar Declaration 2011, p. 4-5)

The translation of migration and development into practice seems to be difficult, and the investment of interests and money seems to be much lower than in the more restrictive part of these migration deals, as e. g. increasing control of migratory flows.

Karim, who had founded an association of deportees in his hometown, also tries to turn his failure into eventual success by trying to exploit his status as a migrant and the experience he gained in migration. But, though he got (verbal) support by the major and the elders of the town, he did not succeed in obtaining material assistance. Only an old broken corn mill was delivered by the Malian DGME, the General Directorate for Malians Abroad, which deals with return migrants, too. Approaching some of the 14 international NGOs active in the town was similarly disappointing. The association obtained a large piece of land to cultivate from the elders, but the search for technical means to cultivate was in vain. The association handed in a detailed project plan to a Scandinavian NGO, but only to get the answer that migrants are not among their target groups. This is in sharp contrast to the public as well as international discourse about migration and development, and hints to a structural gap between the “new” migration & development discourse and the work of established development agencies.

Reviewing relevant EU papers regarding Africa, this is somehow mirrored. Taking proclamations on migration and development, like the Dakar Strategy, there is a close link and strong interest in making migration work for development purposes. If, on the other hand, we consult documents focusing on development, migration plays a marginal role, if it is mentioned at all. Thus, in the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, published by the EU Council December 2007 in Lisbon (EU 2007), migration is totally absent. From the migration side, the link to development is nurtured, while from the development angle, migration is not yet seen as something even worth to be mentioned.

In Mali, there is only one international NGO active in the field of migration and development, GRDR (Groupe de recherche et de Réalisations pour le Développement rural), which had been founded together with Malian migrants in Paris 30 years ago exactly for this purpose. The longstanding activities of traditional development agencies do not include the return migrant, not even the successful one, which is at least interesting in a country marked so strongly by migration as it is the case in Mali.

The same is true for the Malian Government. The draft for a Malian strategy for migration policy also speaks about reception and reintegration of migrants, but all in all focuses on the ‘value’ of migration, which is the money sent or brought back on return (Republique du Mali 2011). The returnee is part of this strategy, and his contribution is included when the paper addresses reintegration, as he might bring money back home which could be invested. But here again, the failed migrant does not really appear, as failure is difficult to talk about in Mali and a failed migrant is not of interest when it comes to the valorization of migration for development.

The strategy, as most other discourses and approaches towards migration and development, concentrates on what the migrant brings home, and that is in first instance, money. Those who return with empty hands cannot hope to be reintegrated, not even the competences they might have gained abroad will be assessed.

Conclusion: The spoken word, the written word, and the silencing of failure

The stories of failed migrants are contrasting the overall image of a migration which is and has to be successful. The message of successful migration is fed by the high expectations related to migration, especially when it goes to Europe, and perpetuated through returning migrants and their families alike, as well as through the jeli, the famous praise singers and masters of the spoken word in Mali.

The thrive for success, which is the dream of many Malians feeling depressed by the overall impression of stagnation and of futility to make an effort for improvement, not only feeds migration and the wish to migrate. At the same time it reinforces the positive image of migration as an exit strategy leading to a successful return, and mutes the vast possibilities to fail in migration or on return.

The idea of successful migration is not affected by efforts of the Malian government or international organizations to establish a counter discourse on the dangers of irregular migration. Migration is seen as linked to risks and hardships, so pointing at these risks does not tell anyone anything new in Mali. Furthermore, also the Malian government, in the attempt to profit from migration for development, puts the successful migrant into the foreground.

This view on migration as successful lasts mostly on the failed migrants and their families. Those who are deported back cannot hope for assistance or understanding, rather, their failure is seen as their personal responsibility and fate.

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