Chapter 1
Introduction: Toward embedding "failed" migratory adventures in southern Mali

It is a hot and dry December morning in the main square of a hub city in southwest Mali. I am here with a group of activists from Mali and Europe in order to participate in and document an event organized by a transnational activist network. Together with community representatives and bereaved families we have come to commemorate the deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean – their "martyrs," as some call them. In this region there are communities with long histories of mobility and migration that take many forms and established practices regarding them. Everybody here has some relation to being on the move, whether through previous or prospective migratory experience of their own, or as a relative, acquaintance, or dependent of a migrant. The numerous chairs set out under sun canopies on the square are still empty. It is early Saturday. The commemoration event, which was preluded at first light by the sacrifice of an ox at the imam's house, will start soon.

As we pass through the square and observe the site, people start to arrive. They are mostly men, middle-aged and young, who come and sit. After a little while, the chairs are filled. More official representatives of the city and members of the bereaved families take their places in the broad main stand flanking the square. We sit with them in the shadow of the canopy as the event is rolled out. As we shortly learn, a large majority of the men seated on these rudimentary chairs typical of the locality have previously been deported.[1] They are what people commonly call refoulés[2]: former adventurers (anciens aventuriers) who "have not made it."

1 The term "deportation" here refers to different forms of forced return, including push-backs, *refoulements*, expulsions, repatriations, and, importantly, transit or emergency returns. My intention is to emphasize the often coercive and above all involuntary nature of these returns without focusing on legal differentiations. This derives from my observation that legal terms are sometimes arbitrarily or dissimilarly used by (Malian and other) representatives of authority and above all by the returnees themselves (cf. Alpes, 2020, 2017; Kleist, 2017a).

2 A term that literally translates as "people who have been pushed back" and that deportees and other "involuntary" returnees most often use to refer to themselves. I will deal with this

Most of them were forcibly returned from the Maghreb states externally bordering the European Union (EU), that is, from Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, or Algeria; others come from Gabon or the two Congos. Few of those who are here have been forcibly returned from European states directly; only a small number have come from Spain, France, Germany, or, most recently, Italy. Many of the latter prefer to stay in Bamako, Mali's capital city. Together with the few from Germany and from other West African countries, the former migrants and deportees form an international crowd to commemorate and value the migrant "heroes," who went out for the well-being and betterment of their communities expecting to return "in triumph" (Latour, 2003). Now they are presumed dead; they cannot even be buried according to the Muslim rule (cf. Sylla & Schultz, 2020).

The day is primarily an occasion to express and share mourning. Several of the parents burst into tears when offered the chance to bring in their testimonies describing the difficulties they have faced. But, in addition, the families and civil society actors are able to express their political discontents, challenging the "neoliberal state," "international donors," and the "development" regime. In their introductory speeches during the main commemoration, representatives of the local authorities harshly denounce the attitude of the Malian government regarding the treatment of Malians abroad. They appeal for agriculture to be properly valued as that would retain "the valid arms on the spot" (field notes, 12-19-2015, in other words "keep fit and effective workers in the country"), and avoid young people "being forced" to leave. The activists' declaration places the central responsibility squarely on the EU, denouncing the political and economic inequalities of restrictive border protection policies and their corollaries, the extinction or distortion of many migrants' lives (Afrique-Europe-Interact [AEI], Mali Section, December 18, 2015, unpublished statement). The Europeans' established discourse on "irregular" migrants will eventually legitimize these policies, including deportations, dividing those on the move into desirables and undesirables (Agier, 2011). Even if it took place out of sight of most participants, the ritual sacrifice element was of central symbolic significance for commemorating the absent, dead bodies. It allowed the dead to be integrated in the "normal" order of a funeral practice, thus ensuring "their rest and salvation," and recovering something from the great loss caused by the politically externalized borders (see Sylla & Schultz, 2020, p. 5).

This situation is a snapshot of the contemporary state of the global deportation regime (De Genova & Peutz, 2010) and of the unequal practices in place at its externalized borders. It marks a very specific historical moment at which border controls, mobility restrictions, and deportations have created everyday realities of

term in more detail shortly. Stefanie Maher (2015) makes similar observations in Senegal. For further explanation see the subchapter headed "Everybody is a *réfoulé*" (p. 33).

death, abuse, trauma, and destruction. Not only have the "migratory failures" produced by these restrictions and forced returns had devastating consequences for individuals within these communities, the expectations of a better life and development for all, in terms of potential economic and social mobility, have been reversed. Albeit a deportee has some chance of continuing and potentially finding new opportunities, a shipwrecked young man cannot be brought back to life. More concretely, the death of a young breadwinner can imply the loss of social status for an entire family and the impossibility of achieving the economic goals expected from the migratory project (see Bredeloup, 2017; Koenig, 2005). The repercussions are substantial and hard to redress. Against this background, contestations and responses evolve far beyond this region of southwest Mali with its long-established migratory patterns and cultures. While experiences are collectively shared and publicly expressed, an individual "failure"[3] through deportation may still be received ambivalently by the community. After deportations, the collective imaginary of success through migration may be particularly contested.

Hazards, survival, and loss in adventure – the emblem of returning empty-handed

Salif's[4] account captures this central ambivalence of returning to one's community involuntarily and with empty hands very well. He comes from a village close to where the commemoration I have just described took place and thus allows me to dive straight in to the micro level of my study. His story illustrates the entanglement of the different political, economic, social, emotional, moral, and cultural dimensions at stake. Now in his late forties, the father of eight children and husband of two wives, Salif is someone who embodies not only the suffering and hardships of the adventurous journey, but the financial loss it can entail as well. All the money Salif earned between 2008 and 2010 in Libya while working on a construction site was lost when the rubber boat he was in went adrift in the open Mediterranean and was finally returned by the Libyan Coast Guard. His journey ended in an odyssey through various prisons. He recalled:

3 Throughout this book, the term "failure" will be set in inverted commas to underline the relative stance I take towards this morally and emotionally charged judgment, as I will explain below. Particularly in the case of deportations, an unwanted return is to be seen first of all as the result of a politico-administrative measure that is potentially economically driven.

4 The names of the respondents have been changed to preserve their anonymity, and information relating to individuals has been partly modified. For the same reason, the deportees' villages and living and working places will not be named specifically and are only roughly characterized.

> Yes, the motor broke. We had one day and two nights when the motor was good, but on that second day, the motor broke down. We spent nine days like that on the water, without motor. This was the water that would help us to get anywhere. We were 152 persons in the Zodiac. And 70 people died in the water. (Salif, 11-1-2015)

The water "that would help [them] to get anywhere," water full of hope and promise turned out to be full of desperation and misery, hardly traversable by Zodiac, a small rubber boat often used to transport people without legal papers over the Mediterranean to enter Italy, Spain, or Greece. The Zodiac becomes a microcosm of the horrors of an unequal world experienced in the suffering and death of the migrants and in the helplessness and despair that follow the conviction that originally persuaded them to get into the boat. It embodies the violence and distress as well as the hope on the high seas that live on in many *refoulés'* memories. At the same time, it represents the contingencies deciding over death and life. The survivors were captured; their journeys were disrupted and reversed. Having lost everything, Salif had to return with empty hands. He had invested all his money in this journey of hope. He forfeited a fortune. He laughs a little bitterly, when recalling his arrival back in the village, but the picture he draws has two sides to it:

> It is a pity, but it is a pleasure, and also disturbing, the money that you've lost and you spent eleven days on the sea and you saw the people die and you are not dead and when you have met your family again, that's a pleasure. But it's a pity for an adventurer to lose all his money like this without gaining anything, and return and start with the hardship here. That's a pity. (Salif, 11-1-2015)

Many men, young ones and older ones,[5] venture out, like Salif, to "search for money" (Bambara: *warignini*)[6] in their youth in order to grow, become someone (*ka kè waritiguiyé*), and contribute (*ka gwa dèmè*) to their families. Their migratory journey is called "the adventure" (French: "*l'aventure*") in large parts of West Africa, as I will shortly elaborate further. But this short episode points up what I call the ambivalence of the "failed" migratory adventure. Salif feels obliged to return to the narrow social space of the village and to the hardships he had left behind. He

5 "Young" or "younger" men refers in emic terms to those aged between 16 and about 40, and very much relates to a person's capacity for mobility and migration and thus for actively contributing to the family income; "older" refers to men outside this broad category.

6 Bambara is the main local language in Mali and the one most frequently used in newspapers, media, and politics as well. I will provide more information on the language and translation of my research in Chapter 3. French is the official language of Mali and is also frequently used in everyday communication. Throughout the text, terms in Bambara and French will appear in italics. The annex includes a Glossary for the main Bambara terms used, and some French equivalents.

considers it a pity, a shame, for an "adventurer" to return without the thing he adventured for. Still, it's a pleasure to be back with the family alive and well.

This book will showcase emic conceptions of peoples' leaving and their often forced and unwanted returns on the one hand, and their going on after deportation on the other as revealed in deportees' (retrospective) narratives and everyday practices. My aim is to develop a differentiated picture of supposed breakdown and "failure" after deportation, showing how it can be a productive category for some people as well, and an indicator of how to go about one's life. This introductory chapter is intended to provide the reader with a theoretical and contextual base for the analysis to come. First, I briefly explain what makes Mali a particularly interesting research setting. Second, I lay out the central question dealt with in the study, which derives from an instance of a supposedly "failed" adventure, and describe my major aim in tackling it. This gains substance in a third section where I introduce the main theoretical lines I have followed and summarize the concepts and terminology that emerged from my research. I then close this introductory chapter by providing an outline of the chapters to come.

The specificities of (post-)deportation in Mali

There are a number of reasons that make Mali an extraordinarily interesting place to study situations and conditions after deportation in general and so-called "failed" adventures in particular. In Mali, the different social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions as well as the relevant actors who are affected by and respond to the global deportation regime intersect in very particular ways. As the country has longstanding cultures of migration (Hahn & Klute, 2007) and different forms of mobility, expatriate Malians constitute a quarter to a third of the country's population. Conversely, Mali has also become a country of immigration and transit for many people journeying northward. In 2008 it was strategically selected by the EU as a pilot country to implement its new approach to migration and development in a place of transit toward the Mediterranean and the outer shores of Europe. Throughout the last few decades, Mali has been impacted by high numbers of forced returns, starting from the time when many African states

gained their independence. Meanwhile, the country has never implemented large-scale deportations itself.[7]

Apart from that, Mali has developed a specific political context, favorable to the establishment of civil society engagement (Lecadet, 2017; Siméant, 2014). In light of the size and importance of the segment of its population living abroad, the *Association Malienne des Expulsés* (AME; the Malian Association of Expellees) was founded in 1996 by a number of former deportees from different African and European countries politically inspired by the movement of the *sans-papiers* in France (cf. Lecadet, 2018, 2011; Cissé, 1999). Over the years, the organization has gained a critical role in the debate on deportations in Mali and beyond and been involved in the reception and reintegration of deportees. It was the organization's activist presence that called my own attention to post deportations in Mali as the flipside of the EU border externalization regime in the nexus of migration and development. I found all these entanglements highly interesting. They demanded more insight and analysis.

Today, there are generations of deportees in Mali, particularly since the externalization of the EU's borders into the African continent received a major new push in the follow-up to the so-called "refugee crisis"[8] and the issue of transit returns became particularly virulent (Alpes, 2020; Zanker & Altrogge, 2019). Since then, deportations, including transit returns, have become an ever more public phenomenon in the country, debated first of all on radio and television, in the newspapers, and at public events. Though the commemoration described at the beginning of this chapter was in itself a unique event, it has to be seen as part of a process of commenting on and contesting national as well as international (migration) policies through civil society actors and former deportees in particular. Today it may no longer be rare, for instance, to see deportees as spokespersons at public events, such as debates about the meaning of migration, return, and opportunities in society, organized by a Malian radio station at the French institute

7 Mali and Tanzania have been unique in this regard on the African continent, though lately the situation has been changing. Individual cases of deportation have been reported from Mali, and the country has been involved in transit returns as well (see Chapter 2). Similarly, Tanzania is said to have been involved in forced repatriations of Burundian refugees: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/tanzania-confidential-document-shows-forced-repatriation-of-burundi-refugees-imminent/, accessed 31 October 2021.

8 While the "refugee crisis" dates back to the protracted situation in which millions of refugees from the Syrian civil war arrived in the Middle East and Turkey and decided to journey on, it was mostly the dilapidated boats setting out from the Libyan coast "full of Africans" and the increasing number of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean that imprinted our image of and approach to this "European crisis."

(*l'Institut français*), or an academic workshop aiming to engage in the public debate on migration[9] (cf. Lecadet, 2018).

Meanwhile, one can now speak of collective experiences of deportation rather than experiences of individual "failure" – as Plambech similarly finds for Nigeria (2018) – and a certain "normalcy" in deportations (Galvin, 2015). Increasingly, these are becoming collective memories of (post) deportation, too, though deportees may still react with shame and may easily be stigmatized (cf. also Plambech, 2018, 2017; Drotbohm, 2015; Dünnwald, 2011; Lecadet, 2011). We know too little about these interrelations and conditions post deportation, above all about individual social experiences and the practices that develop afterwards, particularly over the longer run and in different geographical contexts. This book aims to contribute to filling these gaps in our knowledge. In all this, Mali serves as a particular case of experiencing and reacting to (post) deportations.

Toward the topic and question: "failed" migratory adventures under post-deportation conditions in southern Mali

Within this debated, contested, and simultaneously devastating setting, this book will develop and critically question the concept of the "failed" migratory adventure on the basis of narrative representations (collectively) experiencing and dealing with situations post deportation and the practices developed to help people cope with them. At stake are social, emotional, and material interrelations and perceptions, which often center on loss of money and thus failing the expectations of one's kin. All this indicates what I call the "ambivalence of the 'failed' migratory adventure."

Literary reminiscences – the "failed" hero?

The term "adventure" conjures up a series of literary motifs of the hero who went out into the wilderness and came back broken, unrecognizable, but also changed and enriched in some way, such as the ancient Greek hero Odysseus, the prodigal son in Jesus's parable recorded in St Luke's Gospel, and the medieval knight Parzival (Percival), in a romance written by the knight-poet Wolfram von Eschenbach in Middle High German (13th century). Siddhartha, the rich and sheltered Indian prince who later became the Buddha, is another example. Siddhartha lived years

9 Programme Point Sud 2019, Récits et débats locaux sur la migration. Dits et non-dits de l'expérience du départ et du retour, 2-6 October 2019, Point Sud Bamako, Mali, Rapport; see online : http ://pointsud.org/wp-content/uploads/PPS-2019-R%C3%A9cits-et-d%C3%A9bats-locaux-sur-la-migration-Bamako-Rapport.pdf, p. 5, accessed 31 October 2021.

of ascetic apprenticeship in mostly solitary withdrawal in the Indian wilderness, which brought him eternal wisdom and enlightenment in the end and became the origin of Buddhism. Eventually, all of them grew wiser. They went out to search for something and come back as heroes, but "failed" in one way or the other as a result of the obstacles and trials they had to overcome, before they returned differently than expected, but bringing back something more precious than what they had set out to find. Siddhartha Gautama founded a new religion; Odysseus was eventually recognized, reintegrated and could govern his kingdom well; Parzival had to acknowledge his God-given culpability and sinfulness, his unconscious guilt for the death of his mother and his relative Ither. Eventually, however, after passing through numerous *âventiures*[10], he found the Holy Grail and was received into the circle of the knights of the Round Table (cf. Schwietering, [1944]; 1946, pp. 18ff).

None of these heroes was forced to return, they struggled on to achieve their goals, enduring years of suffering and apprenticeship. The heroic masculine qualities of courage, bravery, steadfastness, and persistence are intrinsic to the stories. Similarly, some migrants continue the struggle when they come back, or refuse to return because they have been unable to live up to the social expectations of a considerable income and contribution to the family that were placed upon them, even though return, if only perhaps for a visit, is the ultimate aim of many (see, e.g., Hernandez-Carretero, 2015; Le Courant, 2014). Deportations come as radically unexpected, unprepared for, and most often deeply unwanted interruptions to their quest. Even if there are substantial differences between them and the literary heroes, the deportees too originally went out to search for something. Their years of suffering before, during, and after deportation also make up a true phase of transition and becoming. Furthermore, former adventurers may show dedication and courage after deportation similar to that of the literary and religious heroes, a theme that will be particularly developed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Like Odysseus, for instance, whose 10 whole years of struggle had rendered him unrecognizable by the time he made it home, many returnees and their social circles report how the former's experiences made them unrecognizable after deportation – physically, but also mentally. They have to recover, to find themselves again and get back to their lives. I will develop this process of arrival, and what deportations can do to people along with presenting their narrative depictions of experiencing deportation in the first analytical chapter. In Kafka's story "Homecoming" (Kafka, 1971), the returned son never verifies whether he is recognizable. He stops in front of the closed door of his parents' house, feeling more and more alienated the longer he stands there. The reader is left with the impression that he

10 In Middle High German; Old French *aventure*, *avanture*). The New High German term "Abenteuer" finally developed from this. See online: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aventiure, accessed 31 October 2021.

will turn around and walk away. Possibly, his time of being away and what happened in between cannot be overcome.

Deportees who have stayed abroad for a long time and far away have the greatest difficulties in finding their way back into their previous lives. They have changed "too" greatly. Some immediately take to the road again in such a situation. Migrants who return of their own volition and well prepared after long periods of time in faraway countries may report a similar change in mind, body, and perception (e.g., Konzett-Smoliner, 2015). Odysseus is finally recognized and reintegrated. Eventually, many deportees are too, even if their traumatic experiences and memories keep impacting them and they did not return as expected. In this sense, references to literary motives of adventure, heroism, and return can be a fruitful source of inspiration and analytical understanding of migratory journeys and their forcible, involuntary interruptions. These motives accompanied my thinking in the further development of the book. First, though, I will throw some light on the relevant local and emic conceptions.

The migratory adventure

In West and Central Africa, the "adventure" (*tounkan*, literally: "going to the wilderness") is the term mostly used to describe migration and departure abroad. Central aims of the migratory adventure are described as striving for social (financial) responsibility, above all for the sake of the family, and becoming independent, "someone" (*ka kè waritiguiyé*), and globally connected. The term captures the different facets of risk, success, and potential "failure" implicit in such an undertaking, referred to elsewhere as "high-risk" or "irregular" migration. The term apparently originates from the time of French colonization and was formerly used for all forms of migration. "*Emigration-aventure*" was how Abdelmayek Sayad (2004) referred to the experience of Algerian emigrants to France in the 1960s, for instance. It implied a necessary process of getting along ("*débrouillardise*") as an individual, in which you had to learn to rely on yourself and which was, not least, a form of learning and making a career.

The migratory adventure in Mali builds on former pilgrimages into the wilderness – "the first collective or individual experience of a man. […] Weeks of walking through the forests, savannah, and soils [that] reinforced his masculinity" (Dougnon, 2012, p. 152) – thought of as an initiation into social adulthood. The wilderness has now been replaced by bigger cities or faraway countries, though the journey's function as a "rite of passage" partially remains, as it involves facing risks, violence, or even death.[11] The migratory adventure, not necessarily toward Europe,

11 Similar ways to adult- and manhood building on rites of "initiation" can be found in Cameroon, for instance, where "bushfalling" commonly refers to going abroad against all obstacles

to gain economic, social and personal success, is "reinterpreted, as a prestigious, 'initiatory,' value-giving experience" (p. 162). Since the 1960s, the migratory voyage, or "the adventure," has been a part of local culture and a popular theme in music, literature, and everyday life in Mali (Dougnon, 2013, pp. 39ff). In this context, mobility is intrinsically connected to masculinity, economic success, socio-cultural recognition, and families' livelihoods. According to Sylvie Bredeloup (2017, p. 139), the adventure is seen as the "spice of life" and an "appreciated lifestyle" by migrants who describe their lives as "more intense and more dignified," "turbulent and fast moving," and themselves as young and courageous, differentiating themselves from those who are "bored and dreaming of a better life at home." Scholars also use the term "adventure" for clandestine migration (e.g., Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2014) or for mobility more generally (Bruijn et al., 2001), besides discussing its function as a "*rite de passage*" and in the process of becoming "a man" (Stock, 2019; Pian, 2009, pp. 44ff), which can only be achieved through suffering. In all this, the adventure is in itself deeply "ambivalent." Janneke Barten concludes from her research on migratory relations in Malian families that it is "something positive and exciting, on the one hand, and something dangerous and not very desirable, on the other" (2009, p. 9). All this reminds one of the literary figures described above, but much of it is readily accepted, as I will show throughout this book.

Meanwhile, migration and the migratory adventure have attained a highly symbolic value in Mali. Migration has become a "fetish" phenomenon, a kind of "a god-thing" (Bazin, 2008), due to the importance of the income it generates and the political construction put upon it (Lima, 2005; Quiminal, 2002). In this context migrants are constructed as "local builders" (Soukouna, 2016), as adventurers (Bredeloup, 2008), and ultimately as "martyrs" (Sylla & Schultz, 2020). For instance, the Malian singer Fatoumata Diawara in her popular song "*Clandestin*" describes the tragedies of today's global inequalities and the existential need for migration on the part of many (2011): "But we call them Men of Adventure" (*Dòw ko olu ma tunkannadenw*),[12] she sings, praising them. In the neighboring Ivory Coast, it is furthermore a common belief that you cannot be civilized if you do not migrate, and migratory journeys have become the "ultimate act of consumption" (Newell, 2012, p. 186; see also Chapter 5 of this book).

Consequently, and again by analogy with the literary heroes, the return of the adventurer, the warrior ("*le guerrier*"), is supposed, as Éliane de Latour (2003) explains, to be voluntary, triumphant, and heroic in the collective imaginary. Returning allows one to realize oneself, to repay one's "debt of life" towards one's parents, as well as to support projects undertaken by one's close family and friends, so that

and returning successfully (Alpes, 2017), while in Sierra Leone the civil war became a means of initiation for young men who joined rebel groups (Jackson, 2005b).

12

success can bring even more advantage and prestige (p. 187). The returnee is supposed to be a hero indeed.

Deportations and the supposed "failure" of the migratory adventure

Restrictive migration policies and multifold borders are what interrupt, stop, redirect, or reverse these migratory journeys (Drotbohm & Hasselberg, 2015) converting them into "new confinements and modes of exploitation" (Glick-Schiller & Salazar, 2013, p. 190). Deportation is generally understood as a legal, political, and socio-economic measure involving the forceful removal of a migrant from a national territory to another country (cf. Drotbohm & Hasselberg, 2015). There is a tendency to consider it as forced removal by air, but research is increasingly considering cross-border removal by land as well (Sylla & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2021; Alpes, 2020; Kleist, 2017a; Mensah, 2016).

Deportations and involuntary returns produce the opposite of the heroic homecomings expected. They violently cut the journey to potential economic success and socio-cultural recognition. Particularly in the West African context, deportations are to be seen in relation to the adventurers' deep social embedding and relationality, before, during, and after the journeys (cf. Pian, 2010, p. 97). Here, the extended family plays a significant role in any aspect of life: West Africans experience themselves not as "having" relationships but as "being" relationships (Piot, 1999), an idea that I will develop, particularly in Chapter 5, and consciously construct their families across (inter)national and continental boundaries (cf., e.g., Drotbohm, 2015, 2009). Deportations thus produce potential "failures" in light of the collective expectation of success and a triumphant homecoming. Against this background, the informants portray themselves as distressed and empty-handed, like Salif: at best with a plastic bag shuffling from the airport to some relative in Bamako. This powerful image emblematically embodies the drama of the unwanted return. As Éliane de Latour puts it: "Failure on the journey is worse than immobility on the spot: from being poor at the start, the warrior becomes poverty-stricken" (Latour, 2003, p. 187; transl. S.U.S.),[13] though in fact such a symbolic and charged depiction does not adequately mirror the realities on the ground.

"Failure," like the term "adventure," emerged in my research as an emic term first of all. Former deportees and their close contacts speak of "*l'échec*" or "*maloya,*" the Bambara word for shame. More often, deportees and their circle will say "*mon objectif n'était pas atteint*" ("My objective was not attained"), or "*je n'ai pas réussi*" ("I did not succeed"), or, more explicitly, "*j'ai échoué*" ("I failed"), "*c'était un échec*" ("It was a failure"). However, the line taken by most of the men is that *tounga man ja* ("the travel did not work out") and "there are other ways of getting on" (Chapters 5 and 6).

13 S.U.S. stands for the initials of the book's author Susanne Ursula Schultz.

From the respondents' descriptions, the potential for "failure" is deeply connected to luck, "*la chance*," (Bambara: *kunna dija* or *gèrè sèkè*), which, in turn, is related to an adventurous mode of trying and seeing within the tension between fate, destiny, and human agency that I discuss further in Chapter 7. Interestingly the medieval term "*âventiure*," used to describe Parzival's journeys, starts from a basic meaning of "chance" and "fate" (from the Latin *adventura* "that which will/should happen").[14] All of this indicates the openness and unexpectedness of the migratory adventure.

For theoretical purposes, it helps to consider academic literature on conceptions of "failure" more broadly. "Failure" is mainly discussed as a phenomenon of the "unsecured temporal perspectives of modern societies," (my translation) related to insecurities, uncertainties, and risks (John & Langhof, 2014, p. 7; Appadurai, 2016). "Failure" is based on the expectation of success, is its opposite in the moment success is missed. René John and Antonia Langhof, however, locate a potential learning process in envisioning "failures" as means of securing the future (2014, p. 7). Arjun Appadurai goes further in his theoretical conceptualization introducing the normativity of "failure," (2016, p. xxvii), which "may be the only thing about it that is truly universal." In any other respect, failure, its measurement, meaning, and means of coping with it (e.g., through risk assessments or by externalizing failures to technological devices in modern, capitalist societies), is prone to change according to historical, cultural, and social factors. Its human-made, normative conception, in accordance with which we behave and act, however, eventually links to questions of the social order (Simmel, [1908] 1958). Appadurai sums up:

> Yet failure is a bigger mystery than it at first appears to be. The most important thing about failure is that it is not a fact but a judgment. And given that it is a human judgment, we are obliged to ask how the judgment is made, who is authorized to make it, who is forced to accept the judgment, and what the relationship is between the imperfections of human life and the decision to declare some of them as constituting failures (Appadurai, 2016, p. xxi).

It is this deep morality of "failure" and the judgmental behavior based on normative and hegemonic conceptions which can cause emotional extremes of stigmatization, shame, and social (self-)exclusion for deportees. Such social mechanisms have been prominently discussed in deportation studies not least as inciting processes of re-emigration or social distancing (cf. Hasselberg, 2018; Khosravi, 2018; Plambech, 2018; Alpes, 2017; Bredeloup, 2017; Drotbohm & Hasselberg, 2015; Schuster & Majidi, 2015; Drotbohm, 2012).[15] Some literature on the consequences of deportation tends to draw an extreme image of such "failures." Mamoutou Tounkara (2013),

14 Later it is reinterpreted as a test the hero has to pass.

15 This needs to be differentiated from theories on return from neo-classical economics and the new economics of labor migration, which center on the failure/success paradigm. This has

for instance, analyzed the narratives of Malian deportees from France whom he interviewed in the rooms of the AME. He was overwhelmed by everybody speaking about "failure" (*"l'échec"*). All his interviewees had returned about six months previously and stayed in Bamako afterwards, indicating that they could not return to their villages as they did not want their family to know about their unsuccess – in other words, in order to save face (see Chapters 4 and 5). Sylvie Bredeloup, who uses Tounkara's study to make her point, appears similarly dramatic in depicting "the moral experience of the migratory adventure" (2017) in which "failure" plays a central role in people being rejected by their communities. It picks up the central aspect of morality in migratory expectations. Stigmatizations in relation to (gang) criminality and violence, which create radical forms of social exclusion, have been specifically discussed in the Latin American post-deportation context (see Chapter 4).

The use of the term "failure" in speaking about deportations links not least to political and public discourses. Even the international media report on stigmatized and socially excluded deportees as a common narrative. In the Malian context, where my research took place, these are to be seen as extreme cases, however. There were people who were reported having been socially excluded. Indeed, as Tounkara shows, particularly those returning from Europe often did not want to go back to their home villages or would simply visit them from time to time, although this trend has recently shown signs of altering. Nevertheless, one cannot speak of a general exclusion from society (cf. also Maher, 2015).[16] Without aiming to downplay the gravity of what may happen in such situations, I want to outline how these depictions are too one-sided, and to provide a more differentiated picture of the Malian context, particularly in regard to what develops over time in rural and urban milieus. Civil society representatives too speak of "failure" and shame very explicitly, mostly when they want to highlight the political cruelty of the administrative act of violating migrants' rights. At the same time, they clearly mean the opposite when they say such things as "it is not the end of the world" (field notes, 10-20-2014).

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been taken further by the structural approach to return migration, which links the individual experience of the migrant to the context of return (cf. Cassarino, 2004, pp. 2ff).

16 The temporality and locality of deportations play a critical role in the post-deportation experience and situation, a theme that I will develop throughout this book. Against this background, Tounkara's work needs to be seen in relative terms. It shows a specific piece of post-deportation reality since the author carried out his research mostly from France, also with regard to the way that he set up contacts with former deportees in Mali. Interviews were conducted exclusively on the premises of the AME, mostly with Malians who had recently been deported from France and who preferred to stay in Bamako instead of returning to their home villages.

In this sense, "failure" can be seen as an integral part of being. It has repercussions, but one mostly goes on. Consequently, "failure" and success can be "two sides of the same coin" (Voirol & Schendzielorz, 2014, p. 27) or "provisional containers for one another" (Appadurai, 2016, p. xxv; see Chapter 7). All this very much seems to resemble deportees' conceptions as I will show. Against this background, the analysis of what this judgmental "failure" is and means in this specific time and cultural context, and moreover, how people cope with the defined and perceived "failures" of their migratory adventures after deportations, is highly interesting for understanding more about people's social lifeworlds in light of the effects of the global deportation regime in southern Mali.

Central questions, aims, and contentions

Against this background, the central question I attempt to answer in this book is: How did the deportees that I met, interviewed, and accompanied in Mali, cope with having been deported and with the situation in which they found themselves back "home," even years after their return?

From this a number of related questions developed as I worked on my study: What does deportation do to former deportees? What are people's socio-economic perspectives and their strategies, and what is their everyday life like after deportation? In what ways are they socially embedded or disembedded? How does a deportation affect a person's life over the long term?

Overall, I am interested in doing two things. First, in finding out whether the literal mass of people who have experienced deportation in the last few years has contributed to a change of discourse as well as of social and political practice in Mali; second, and most importantly, in revisiting the global horizons of migratory success.

The aim of this work is thus not a stark focus on "failure" itself. The data collected and the results analyzed showcase a very specific historic, political, social, cultural, and economic setting post deportation in southern Mali. The ambivalent and potentially "failed" migratory adventure developed as a central analytical lens that enabled a better understanding of the social dimensions that deportees narrate and that I could observe. The book thus goes beyond the individual level of return and deportation and links to the social dimension as well as the historical and structural context, entangling dominant discourses and paradigms.

My main contention is that we cannot speak of sheer "failure" when talking about deportations and involuntary returns. Even if normative conceptions are fundamentally shattered, they continue to have an impact .So we need rather to see the ambivalence of the situation and the experiences and practices it engenders. As a first step, deportation is defined as an administrative and political structural intervention. In a second, "judgmental," social implications come into play. Finally,

such supposed "failures" may be specific moments (conjunctures), where subjectivities and agency develop. Consequently, a perceived "failure" may spin off new energies and motivations for courageously going on, working hard, and standing one's ground. The following chapters will analyze narrative and practical accounts given under (post-)deportation conditions and examine their effects and reactions to them in their social, emotional, and material dimensions in different places and in a broader context, besides considering what they may imply in the long run.

Everybody is a *refoulé*

The supposedly "failed" migratory adventures that I analyze below, encompass repatriations – self-induced, though mostly unwanted (for reasons such as a political crisis, sickness or injuries, lack of money, family problems back home, to name but a few) – and unscheduled returns without having obtained the objective aimed at, *refoulements* over the border, deportations by air or over land. Many of the people were deported in trucks from the North African interior on ways through the desert and set down close to the Malian border; others were turned back while they were on their way to Europe – or from a European country itself, after a certain time on the move, in a country of destination abroad, or just after leaving their country of departure. The majority were already on boats – crossing the Mediterranean (from Libya, Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia) or the Atlantic Ocean (from Mauritania or Morocco). They were forced to return due to bad weather conditions or technical problems such as the motor breaking down, as in Salif's case; others were literally lost at sea. Alternatively, and often in addition, boats were intercepted by patrols and escorted back to shore. Furthermore, migrants may have been deported immediately on their arrival in the Canary Islands, Malta, or Italy (cf. Hernandez-Carretero & Carling, 2012, p. 410). In all these cases, former deportees most often speak of themselves as "*refoulés*" in everyday language, no matter where they came back from and how. This may even refer to those who returned through a program of "assisted voluntary return (and reintegration)," increasingly seen as the more humane and flexible alternative to deportation (see Chapter 2). The exact legal status and condition of return are not decisive in the end.[17]

I differentiate between deportations from other African countries, particularly those in North Africa, and deportations from Europe with respect to their symbolic meaning and the specific power imbalances inherent in them (cf. Walters, 2002; see also Chapter 4). Deportations from France, for instance, were perceived

17 This differs from the terminology of "state-induced" returns (Koch, 2014), which would imply deportations, repatriations, as well as "assisted voluntary" and so-called transit returns.

from the beginning as a direct colonial continuity (cf. Lecadet, 2016). The increasing trend of intra-African deportations, *refoulements*, and repatriations, including transit returns, particularly from North Africa, connected with the externalization of EU borders to the African continent has not so far been sufficiently analyzed and researched in depth and through micro-level ethnographic studies.[18] This book will make a contribution to this strand. Often those returned from Europe are referred to as *expulsés*, a term specifically applied in activist terminology. It builds on a process of self-designation leading to collective action, mainly advanced by the AME, in which the absent, almost shameful figure of the expelled migrant has become an actor capable of taking part in public debate (cf. Lecadet, 2018). Everyday language, however, and media representations do not necessarily differentiate in a similar way: terms are often used interchangeably.

Embedding research situations post-deportation in Mali

This book belongs within the literature of deportation and return, which has come to a number of unambiguous findings in recent years. Even if they concern human beings in a political field, however, most of these studies have not found a way to enhance the broader debate or political practice. I will briefly summarize some of the relevant examples.

The study of deportations is an interdisciplinary field developed from border and security studies within the last 20 years (Coutin, 2015). Deportation is discussed as a measure to implement penalties against immigrants through detentions and forced returns (Drotbohm & Hasselberg, 2015) that has become increasingly normalized in the Global North, particularly in the "deportation nation," the United States (Kanstroom, 2012), in European countries, above all the United Kingdom (Gibney, 2004), in Australia (Schuster & Bloch, 2005) and in many other countries. Matthew Gibney coined the term "deportation turn" (2008) to capture "recent government successes in boosting deportation" that "bypass or avoid violating liberal norms" (p. 148). Meanwhile we are said to be living in an "age of deportations" (Boehm, 2016), characterized by a "culture of deportation" highlighting the criminalization of migration and the making of border policy.[19] Deportations are thus

18 Extant examples include the work of Nauja Kleist (e.g., 2017) on accounts given by deportees from Libya in Ghana, as well as the on-going research on return and reintegration experiences in the Gambia by Judith Altrogge (cf. Zanker & Altrogge, 2019), and, lately, the work on emergency returns from Libya and Algeria (e.g., Alpes, 2020) as well as by Almamy Sylla and Signe Marie Cold Ravnkilde (2021).

19 Cf. the related internet platform for information and mobilization: http://cultureofdeportation.org/, accessed 31 October 2021.

usually differentiated from other forms of return, most importantly other state-induced ones such as "Assisted Voluntary Returns" (AVRs).

Anderson et al. (2011) assert that deportations have become a constitutive practice reaffirming the normative boundaries of "who is a member and who has the right to judge who belongs" (p. 547) in an international system of independent states. Deportations are thus inherently connected to the development of the modern nation; they manifest its territory and build states' sovereignty (cf. Walters, 2002; De Genova, 2002).[20] Importantly too, deportations often serve a purpose in symbolic politics.[21]

For a long time, however, deportations have been viewed as a phenomenon of the Global North's attitude toward the Global South, reversing supposedly established migratory pathways. This is reflected in contributions by researchers and participants at academic events. Nevertheless, the history of deportations on the African continent dates back to the 1960s, the years in which many states gained their independence, and needs to be seen as a postcolonial legacy with emergent states inheriting the "Western" concept of the modern nation-state (for more on this subject, see Chapter 2). This has barely found a place in academic discussion so far.

In 2006 Nathalie Peutz called for an "anthropology of removal," taking into account the different aspects and phases of deportations. Notwithstanding, expulsions are mainly discussed as stirring internal debates in liberal societies (cf. Lecadet, 2013), while the impact on the social and political life of the countries from which the expelled migrants originate, or through which they pass, has attracted relatively little attention. This underlines the Eurocentric bias in the deportation literature. Academic work has mainly focused on the earlier stages of deportation: on the resistance against it (e.g., Daphi et al., 2017; Nyers, 2015, 2003), the established state practice (e.g., Ellermann, 2013, 2009), or the perils of a deportation experience (e.g., Hasselberg, 2016; Fekete, 2005). Studies of conditions after deportation have increased in number recently and most often follow ethnographic accounts and highlight the micro level of analysis (cf. Khosravi, 2018). It became clear through my own research, in fact, that in-depth ethnography appeared to be the most satisfactory way to grasp the complex social, emotional, moral, and material entanglements and dynamics that accompany deportations. As I shall further explore in my chapter on methodology, it appeared increasingly critical to immerse myself to some degree in social lifeworlds post deportation, including elements of

20 The genealogy of deportations goes back to the slave trade (Walters, 2002).

21 The "deportation gap" (Rosenberger & Küffner, 2016) indicates that more persons are supposed to be deported than can actually be removed.

participatory and action research, in order to grasp the gist of what these social dimensions imply.[22] But much more in-depth research is needed.

Stephan Dünnwald (e.g., 2017; 2011) and Clara Lecadet (e.g., 2018, 2011) are those who have done most research on post-deportation situations in Mali so far. They both started with the AME, on and off, accompanying the organization's work over several years, thus playing a major role in researching the political and social space after deportations in Mali between 2008 and 2011, a time marked by a high number of deportations from Europe. They provided an in-depth insight into the self-organization of deportees in Mali; they also roughly developed the social dimension post forced return as well, in some cases in Kayes and Yanfolila, but mostly in Bamako. Lecadet gave a sketch of the overall deportation regime at that time and the massive number of returns of Malians and other Africans in transit at the borders of Mali and in Bamako. Even if my work goes more into the fine-grained social dynamics, above all in rural areas, and the political situation has changed since their time with ever more collective responses to deportation, their work importantly informed this study and will be referenced time and again. The more recent work of Almamy Sylla (2019) more specifically analyzes the reintegration trajectories of Malian repatriates from the Ivory Coast and Libya between 2002 and 2017 in an impressively thorough and comprehensive way. Even though it deals with a specific case, his work and our collaboration have substantially influenced my thinking; it is therefore integrated and referenced accordingly.

Deportability and deportation as a process over time and space

My work focuses on the continuation of deportation as a process long after an actual deportation has taken place, impacting former deportees and their social circle often many years later. Deportation studies have highlighted some of the temporal and spatial effects of deportations in terms of their processual character: deportations may start long before an individual is apprehended, "through the myriad practices that make someone vulnerable in the first place" (Coutin, 2015, p. 674) and render actors "deportable" (De Genova, 2002). Furthermore, the transnational impact of deportation "continues long after an individual is returned, through the difficult process of readjustment, the ripple effects on family members and the continued prohibition on re-entry" (Weber & Powell, 2018, p. 206).

22 In anthropology there has been a general debate about the constant ambivalence of proximity: the insights gained through getting close up or "going native," on the one hand, as against the alienation or even menace generated by strangers. This has been clearly changing with the rise of more participatory methods (see Lachenmann, 2010, p. 19 or Breidenstein et al., 2013). For more on this, see the discussion in Chapter 3.

Nicholas De Genova's term "deportability" (2002) has fundamentally shaped the discussion of deportations through drawing attention to the constant potentiality of being deported which eventually shapes a "condition of everyday life of migrant 'illegality' creating fundamental insecurity eventually rendering 'undocumented' migrant labor a distinctly disposable commodity" (De Genova, 2002, p. 438) and thus facilitating migrants' exploitation on the labor market. In this sense, deportations have become a "crucial strategy for contemporary neoliberal capitalism" (Khosravi, 2018, p. 4) and reproduce global social inequalities and injustices (p. 6), differentiated exclusions and inclusions, related to broader processes of "social expulsions and marginalization" (p. 12) before as well as after deportations. A condition of undocumentedness, at least as inscribed in a person's memory and emotions, may continue to have an impact after an actual deportation, as I will develop here.

Consequently, deportations are more than "simple" (Peutz, 2006) or "discrete" (Coutin, 2014, p. 4) events, and deportation is a "process that spans over long periods of time and geographical areas" (Hasselberg, 2018, p. 16). Nyers (2003) identifies a "transnational corridor of expulsion," which evolves between the waiting areas, the detention facilities, and the deportation flights, while Heike Drotbohm and Ines Hasselberg speak of the "deportation corridor" which relates to this space between leaving and arriving as well as all the different actors involved (2015).[23] Others have described deportations as side events (Galvin, 2015; Schuster & Majidi, 2015; Bloch & Schuster, 2005), which mostly relates to the frequency of deportations and a certain everydayness about them, which may allow better strategies of survival and coping. Deportations from North African countries are not necessarily an everyday phenomenon for returnees; still they seem to carry a certain element of "normalcy" in the cases investigated.

Re-emigration is often seen as a consequence of deportation (e.g., Alpes, 2017; Schuster & Majidi, 2013; Dünnwald, 2012), in that the latter creates a space of what could be termed a space of forced mobility. Others have theorized deportation as one point in the migration cycle (Kleist, 2017a; Cassarino, 2016, 2014, 2004).[24] From my research it appears that many deportees effectively try to re-emigrate, while others talk about leaving again, but never do so in the end. Many deportees are

23 Deportation is not limited to the encounter between the deported person and the deporting nation-state. Rather it involves a variety of people and institutions, from deportees, their families, and communities to civil servants, border agents, immigration lawyers and judges, prison and immigration detention staff, bureaucrats, civil society organizations, security personnel, activists, and the media (cf. Hasselberg, 2018, p. 16).

24 In this context, a migration cycle refers to the whole process of migration, from emigration, via immigration to another country to return to one's country, considering the relevant circumstances in each of these phases (Cassarino, 2016). See further Chapters 4 and 5.

thus immobilized after deportations, unable to re-emigrate due to migratory constraints, lack of money or the family expecting them to stay. There is a large space of immobility after deportations as well. Talking about a new adventure becomes a constitutive part of their being and of the everyday, as I will show.

So far, research has focused mainly on people encountered shortly after a forced return and on the organizational structures involved, besides being based above all in urban areas. The work of Heike Drotbohm greatly contributes to the study of the social dimensions of, and transnational ruptures caused by, deportations from the United States to Cape Verde, also over the longer term (2016, 2015, 2012, 2011). Likewise, the recent ethnographic studies by Nauja Kleist on Ghana (2017a, b, c), in parts of Sine Plambech's work on Nigerian women (2018, 2017) or by Stefanie Maher on *refoulés* in Senegal (2015) explore the social dimensions of life after deportation in West Africa. But studies of the complex in-depth social dimensions of deportations in urban and as well as in rural areas and set a longer time after deportation in Mali do not exist so far. Above all a perspective on rural contexts after deportation is badly needed, as "deportation is not the end of a 'problem,' but the start of a new and ongoing dilemma for individuals, families, and the wider community" (Pereira, 2011, p. 11). Temporality becomes a central dimension, as well as age. I will show how this links in with immobility and re-emigration after deportations.

Structure and aims of the book

In the following chapters, I intend to tell a particular Malian story of situations after deportation, using as my analytical lens the ambivalence of what I term the supposedly "failed" migratory adventure. By following the narratives and everyday practices of former deportees and their social circles, my book will extend our knowledge of the everyday lives of people in these situations, especially who live in the southern Mali. It focuses on the "space of immobilization" after deportations as well as their long-term impacts. In the Malian context, although deportations create multiple ruptures, they are integrated into patterns both of circular and social mobility and of remaining on the spot. So, in the end, the book is about renegotiation, navigation, and repositioning after deportation.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the historical, social, economic, political, and cultural context of the selected case to enable the analytical results of the study to be better understood and situated. I will describe the history and setting of migrations in Mali, as well as the role that deportations have played from pre- to postcolonial times ending with the latest developments in EU border externalization measures up to the recent Valletta process. Along with that, I will sketch the particular reactions to deportations by different actors, including former deportees, which make the Malian case specific.

Chapter 3 develops the methodology of the study, describing how the field site was defined and data were generated. A central place is reserved for discussing specific positionalities in order to understand what I was able to research and what I was not, including the how and why. Further, the chapter reflects on the methods I used and the analytical steps I followed, concluding with further thoughts on the specific kind of ethnography necessary for operationalizing my central research question: how deportees deal with having been deported and their situation back "home," even years after being returned.

Chapters 4 to 7 constitute the main analytical part of this study. Chapter 4 empirically sets the reader inside conditions post deportation through deportees' remembering and narrating their deportation experiences after their arrival and later on. It aims to enable an understanding of what these mostly unexpected and violent acts do to former deportees (and potentially to their social circles), revolving around different aspects and accounts of suffering. Using selected cases, I will show the social suffering caused by the process of deportation from North African or European states, plus how deportees experience it on the basis of their own agentic accounts.

Chapter 5 centers on the main narrative of suffering after deportation condensed into the loss of money and the emblematic "empty hands" that follow supposed "failed" migratory adventures. By focusing on the role of money and its social meaning in southern Mali, it reveals the meanings of contributing, reproduction, and the management of social and emotional relations after deportation, based around the concept of shame in light of (unfulfilled) expectations and strategies of silence, talk, and gossip over time.

Chapter 6 focuses on the everyday practices of going on under conditions post deportation, through hard work, courageous engagement on the spot, and, most importantly, (re)interpretations of the suffering one has experienced. All these are strategies to enable one to eventually recover or renegotiate one's masculinity post deportation. On that basis, the last analytical chapter, Chapter 7, centers on the cosmological as well as everyday notion of "*la chance*," (*kunna dija*) which serves as the final means of sense- and future-making in the face of deportation, eventually opening up a potential space for new chances and even new (collective) imaginings. The concluding chapter summarizes the study's central results, also dwelling briefly on two remaining aspects: sociological ambivalence in light of the "failed" migratory adventure and the political dimension and what remains to be done.

Overall, the book provides an exemplary ethnographic view of the deportation regime at work in southern Mali and, by fleshing out this particular Malian example, it builds a basis for further engagement by deportation studies in how this regime can have a profoundly transformative effect on the society at large and what shape that transformation will take.