

## Chapter 5

# “It’s [not] all about money.” – About returning with empty hands and relational (re)negotiations in the adventurer’s drama of return

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In the context of southern Mali, money and wealth play a central though ambivalent role socially, particularly in post-deportation conditions. The central narrative of suffering and potential failure in deportees’ accounts revolves around “returning with empty hands” (*les mains vides*; *bololankoloun* or *tègèlākouloun*<sup>1</sup>) after having left “to look for money” (*chercher de l’argent*; *ka taaga wari gnini*; *warignini*). Salif, the father of eight children and husband of two wives whose story I told in the introductory chapter, returned with nothing in his hands, in other words destitute. Brahim in the previous chapter felt demoralized most of all because all his money had been “wasted” – a thing to be avoided by any possible means, people say, because it can lead to rejection and a deep sense of shame at not having made it. Kleist calls it “the epitome of failure” (2017a, p. 184). This chapter, most importantly it is about the meaning of contributing, reproduction, and the management of social relations.

“Family,” “leaving,” and “money” are the words I find mentioned most often in all my fieldwork documents – transcribed interviews, conversations and notes – when I word-filter them through the MAXQDA analysis tool.<sup>2</sup> This assigns the discursive level, giving evidence not only of established narratives, but also of the practices of family/kinship, livelihood, and mobility, which are intrinsically interconnected in West Africa. The particular meanings of money on the one hand and wealth more generally on the other have to be differentiated and analyzed more carefully, however, especially, again, in the post-deportation context. According to my respondents’ narratives and practices, money is primarily needed to support one’s kin and for use in the livelihood economy. One has to have it to marry, to

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1 “Retourner avec les mains vides” is *ka segin bololankoloun* in Bambara.

2 Particularly in the second field phase as I conducted more research in the rural village(s) of return, where family connections were more explicit in everyday life and conversations.

build a house, for education and schooling, for leaving as well as staying, not least for participating in the consumption economy and, importantly, for acquisitions to be used in agriculture or in building up a small business. In the end, the aim is to become rich and bring wealth to the family. All that makes "a man." "Money helps to solve problems," as one deportee summarized it. In sum, money is needed for all the important matters in life, and wealth is considered to be what you can achieve by means of money. It is the ultimate goal, the end result of the whole process in terms of social status, becoming someone (*ka kè waritiguiyé*), and benefitting one's kin. Respondents consistently refer to money or means ("*moyens*"); this will be the term principally scrutinized here as well.

The meaning of going out to look for money and returning with empty hands can thus only be understood by regarding its broader social and symbolic dimensions, its "cultural matrix" (Parry & Bloch, 1989, p. 1). Narratively, money seems to be everything, but it is still not of capital importance. A common trope in Mali is "the highly ambiguous image of 'money,' both as epitome of what is aspired to yet cannot be achieved and as an almost personalized force responsible for the erosion of trust, love, and a sense of moral obligation" (Schulz, 2002, p. 813; see also Schulz, 2012, 2005; Weiss, 1996; Taussig, 1980). The monetization and commoditization of everyday life in African societies has been the subject of many debates (e.g., Jackson, 2017; Wooten, 2005; Guyer, 2004, 1995; Parry & Bloch, 1989; Hart, 1982)<sup>3</sup>: an obsession with possession is said to stand face to face with an increasing lack of financial means and prospects (cf. Mbembe, 2007).<sup>4</sup> Even so, money may have a fundamentally preserving function for social relations, as Parry & Bloch (1989) suggest in their standard work on the subject.

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3 While money and monetization are not solely related to capitalist ideology (cf. Graeber, 2011; Parry & Bloch, 1989), commoditization refers to the introduction of market economies. According to Arhin (1995), monetization can be understood in two senses: "in the technical sense of a generally accepted medium of payment," and "in the substantive sense," which is applied for the purposes of this work, "of the extent to which the accepted medium of payment forms the basis of transactions or interactions in areas of the economy and in the social and political sectors" (Arhin, 1995, p. 97; cf. also Bohannan & Dalton, 1962, pp. 20ff; Wooten, 2005; Parry & Bloch, 1989, p. 12; Taussig 1980). Commoditization, as coined by Hart (1982), is used to define the unprecedented level of economic integration in human society and its evolution as an all-encompassing dialectic process, related to the growth of capitalism, the market economy, industrialism, and other aspects of life, centering on "a division of labor," and the production and exchange of commodities (p. 38). The term "commodification" further refers to the fact that consumption has taken over from production as the driving force structuring society (cf. Van Hear, 2014, p. 104; cf. Castoriadis, 1964).

4 Neoliberalism in particular has given rise to new forms of wealth and inequalities in economic production and social reproduction (cf. Meiu, 2017, p. 157; see also Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001).

West Africans have been using money for a very long time, but “the monetization of [their] economies accelerated and intensified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Berry, 1995, p. 299). The incorporation of West African economies into global markets in the 1980s made states as well as ordinary people “increasingly vulnerable” to fluctuations in those markets (Guyer, 1995, p. 17). Monetary transactions became ambiguous or unstable and people tried to maintain or create alliances and networks to negotiate successfully over goods and services. In turn, the ambiguity of social relations rendered the returns on social investments uncertain. Economic and political instabilities play into such bargaining and require a substantial multiplication of social networks and their management (Berry, 1995, p. 309). Accordingly, money is a contested issue relating to a whole complex of social dynamics, relations, and positions, particularly within the family. After deportation, these are challenged and need to be (re)negotiated – not least the social order itself.

Migratory adventures have themselves become a versatile object of monetization and commodification, and the “ultimate act of consumption” (Newell, 2012, p. 186). As in other rites of passage, such as marriage and death, monetary payments have replaced gifts in kind, or gifts of personal support and loyalty (cf. Arhin, 1995, pp. 97f), particularly with respect to earning money abroad and remitting it back home. Deportations disrupt this monetary endeavor. Intrinsically embedded in multiple social webs, they substantially impact upon social relations and the economic stability sometimes of an entire family, being bound to affect people's health and sense of themselves in fundamental ways.

Even though most consider themselves simply as *refoulés*, it does seem to make a difference how somebody has been deported, after how long a period of time, and from where, so that a socio-economic repositioning is usually necessary. Money and its loss are thus a useful starting point for fleshing out the social ambivalences of “failed” migratory adventures in order to better understand situations post deportation and provide a more fine-grained analysis of them that goes beyond the restlessness, desperation, and suffering previously described. Consequently, I want to explore “leaving to look for money” and “returning with empty hands” as a set of material, social, moral, and symbolic processes, practices, and representations of value in order to understand what seeking wealth and experiencing loss reveal about the making of social worlds after a person has been deported (cf. Meiu, 2017, p. 143). To do so, I will empirically deepen the cases of Salif and Karim, contrasting them with Yakouba, who did return with some money. This principally relates to being embedded after deportation. Against this background, it is necessary to reflect further on the connection between searching for money and contributing (*ka gwa dème*) as a “good” member of society. In the second part of the chapter, I will further develop this theme with regard to the subjects' respective (re)negotiations and positioning of themselves within the family and neighborhood relations

as well as to the social dynamics of shame, silence, and gossip over time and how they relate to contesting or confirming the social order. To conclude, I will briefly reflect on the ambivalent social and symbolic dimensions of money, wealth and debt vis-à-vis restricted mobilities and large-scale immobility post deportation in southern Mali.

### Salif, Karim and returning to the village: "tounga man ja" <sup>5</sup>

Deportees describe returning empty-handed to one's family's village as demoralizing, deeply disturbing, and the primary source of their suffering after deportation. Salif returned, like many others, after a time of recovery with his brother in Bamako. Even though he was deported, like thousands more in the post-Gaddafi turmoil in 2011, he seemed to feel an individual responsibility for his loss. He was torn between resignation and relief, between having lost tremendous sums of money and the joy of being back healthy and alive: "It is a pity, but it is a pleasure, and also disturbing, the money that you've lost," (cf. Chapter 1) he sets the loss of money at the center of his narrative. Before leaving the village, Salif had been saving bit by bit. For 10 years he cultivated peanuts and bred animals. In addition, he sold his two draft oxen. Salif is a scrawny-looking fellow, thin, but strong. Like many of his age here, he is missing a number of teeth, which is clearly visible when he smiles. After his return to the village, he was unable to sleep, having difficulty believing what had happened to him. We should remember his traumatic accounts of living in Libyan prisons given in the previous chapter:

I went for one week without sleep because this situation, in which I was deported, was very difficult for me, especially when you see the situation of the family. There are also some people with whom you went to the same class in school and when you see them, they have money; so if you think about all that, you get upset (*dérangé*), and many of my class mates work in administration, which is why I wanted to go and search [for money] abroad. So, if it's not possible, I'll come back, won't I? [*laughs*]

It's lack of means that forces us to do the agriculture, if not, one does not earn anything you get less to eat and you have less wealth.

(Salif, 11-1-2015)

Salif's economic situation when he got back was much worse than before, which obliged him to return to the village: "I had no other choice; all the money was lost." The comparison with the others' success – "they have money" – had originally pushed him to leave. In his village it is clear who has money and who does

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5 "The adventure did not work," in French: "*l'aventure n'est pas marché.*"

not, and it is most visible in the investments (or lack of them) made in everyone's houses. Corrugated iron as the roof of the house is a sign of success in comparison to a roof made of straw; walls made of concrete are seen as a major advance on traditional walls made of mud, as the former withstand the rainy season, which is an existential advantage in this climatic region. Salif did not come from an overall poor family, though. Dolores Koenig conducted research in the area of Salif's village, some ten kilometers south of the capital of the administrative area, investigating the connections between structural stratification and migration (Koenig, 2005a, 2005b, 1986). In terms of her findings, Salif came from a sufficiency household where potentially some, albeit small, investments in housing and schooling were possible.<sup>6</sup> Several graduate students lived in the family's village compound, searching and waiting for jobs: their elder brother, a small businessman in Bamako, was trying to find them something. Leaving to work abroad in order to support the family financially was meticulously planned. That it did not work out (*tounga man ja*) caused deep anxiety in view of the responsibility that Salif proved unable to take on. Still, he laughed. It was like a sign of desperation, but at the same time it somehow signaled acceptance – if he could not make it abroad, he would try here, even if it was generally more difficult.

Karim, Salif's childhood friend, gave similar reports about his deportation from Libya, which had taken place two years earlier. First, he refused to return to the village at all:

I did not have so much money, that's why I went to Mamoutou [my brother]; also the aim was to rest down there. That was more comfortable for me than going to the village directly. In this moment, it was hard for me. My spirit was tumbled because, when you look at it, I went to school, it did not work out, and then I left on the adventure. They deported me to Mali. I did not like this. These two defeats marked me very much. That's why I took the initiative to go to Mamoutou. He and I, we could talk better and he could also provide me with some advice before I returned to the village. I could not go directly to the village, because I had left there to go and search for money. Well, the fact that the adventure did not work out, I did not know how to come to the village and explain this to my family (*laughs*). This was difficult. My father and my mother were old, and I returned from the adventure with empty hands. Oh, it was difficult for me to return to the village. (Karim, 10-31-2015)

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6 Dolores Koenig differentiates "sufficiency" households from "more than sufficiency" and "insufficiency" ones. While more than sufficiency households are able to invest in various activities, insufficiency households often lacked the labor or capital to maintain adequate living standards (Koenig, 2005a, pp. 84f).

Karim impressively describes the difficulties of returning without money, empty-handed, unable to contribute and care for his aging parents. Penniless, he first of all took refuge with relatives for one month in Bamako. Then he went on to his brother, who was based in the community administration of another region. “My spirit was tumbled” and “my heart cried”<sup>7</sup> he graphically describes his deep emotions: first, his career as a teacher had not worked out, as he was sick for a long period; and the second try supported by his brother failed. He decided to leave his home village, go towards the Sahara and Libya and later continue to Europe. This is the processual, but at the same time ad hoc, development of migratory journeys that other respondents report. Leaving becomes an “exit option,” as Aminata Dramane Traoré (2008, p. 34) calls it, when repeated failures – in school, education, and agriculture or within the family – add up. However, Karim’s adventure did not work out either: without papers, he was caught in his “foyer”<sup>8</sup> in Tripoli, where he was working as a private gardener. Some were able to flee over the wall; Karim was imprisoned. After two weeks with little food and dirty water, he was flown out on a charter back to Bamako: “I did not earn any money. This was hard (*o ka gèlèn*).” He talks about his migratory “defeat.” Karim was ashamed – though he did not say so explicitly. It was his brother who eventually encouraged him to return. At that time, Karim was one of the first deportees in the village.

### Yakouba’s return with some money

Once a migratory adventure does not work out, it means an economic setback and immediate decrease in life chances for the whole family (cf., e.g., Bredeloup, 2017; Drotbohm, 2015; Schuster & Madji, 2015) – it is irretrievable, as Salif said. To have sent remittances during one’s absence would have been a better preparation for one’s return (cf. Calenda, 2014b). Others who were able to send money seem to have had fewer difficulties, even if they returned unexpectedly and had been forced to do so. Yakouba, another young man in the village, seemed self-assured: “I did not have any difficulties with the family,” he announced, “because when I was there [in Libya], I sent money and they [the family] did not wish me to find myself in difficulty when I returned. They helped me to do something.” In Yakouba’s eyes, the

7 My spirit was tumbled in Bambara: *né hakili koun fènan kodjoukou*; my heart cried: *o fila faralen gnongon kan*; *o yé ne dousou kasi*.

8 “Foyer” describes the communal accommodation of Malians abroad, often in very basic conditions. It has multiple functions such as social cohesion and security and, not least, allows one to maintain oneself cheaply over longer periods of stay. Often people live together in regional and ethnic networks, even ones that are specific to particular communities and villages of origin (cf., e.g., Cagnol, 2012; Calandre & Ribert, 2012), see online for instance <https://montreuilonthemove.wordpress.com/2013/04/17/bamako-sur-seine-foyer-bara-montreuil-malian-village/>, accessed 31 October 2021.

fact that he sent money was the reason for his smooth return. He came from a large family in the village. Most of his brothers and uncles were on site. "My father was old and I am the only son." Monetary support was needed, so he left his wife and little daughter "to search for money." He earned for his journey as a farm worker in the neighboring district and sold animals. Like Salif, he lost a fortune: for three years he worked as a gardener and transferred a sum to a facilitator to go by boat to Italy, but also sent some money home. He even financed his cousin to join him. After deportation, he stayed with family members in Bamako too, but worked on a construction site. Back in the village, Yakouba was able to buy some new animals to continue his livestock farming. In the event, he was able to share and contribute before leaving, during his absence, and after his return; he could thus somehow comply with the pre-eminent requirement, that of making a contribution.

In research on return migration, "preparedness" (e.g., Gerlach, 2018; Plambech, 2018; Turnbull, 2018; Hernández-Carretero, 2017; Cassarino, 2016, 2004; Flahaux, 2015; Sinatti, 2011) and "embeddedness" before and after the adventure are centrally discussed categories for ensuring a beneficial return, also in terms of development (e.g., Ruben et al. 2009; Davids & van Houte, 2008; Kloosterman, 2006). In a quantitative and qualitative investigation into return in Mali, Jean-Pierre Cassarino and colleagues' country comparison study (2014) found that the large majority of returns to Mali had been involuntary interruptions of migration cycles (cf. Chapter 1): being deprived of the possibility of deciding for oneself when, how, and whether to go back, was shown to be the most restricting factor with regard to a decent return and the returnee's ability to reintegrate sustainably, as it had the most degrading effect on his or her autonomy. Through deportation, any preparation for a return is violently cut off and rendered impossible, "non-existent" as Cassarino puts it (2014, p. 7; 2004, p. 20). Transnational connections can serve as source of social belonging while away, as well as for financial and social embeddedness after one's return (cf. Carling & Erdal, 2014; Ruben et al., 2009). The (social) embeddedness approach – with Kloosterman (2006) and Van Houte & Davids (2008) I understand embeddedness to consist in the relevant context and networks established before leaving and while away, and re-established after deportation – is particularly useful for analyzing situations after deportation as it allows one to capture conceptually the different contextual dimensions in which a person operates.<sup>9</sup> Khosravi (2018)

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9 Kloosterman's approach of "mixed embeddedness" (2006) refers to economic, psychosocial, and social networks "and van Houte and Davids' "multidimensional and multilocal embeddedness" (2008) to different contexts, and spaces – in territorial (multi-local) and non-territorial terms. Van Houte & Davids highlight the importance of identity formation, which can be disturbed after deportations by being rejected by the closest family; it can also hinder the establishment of social networks, which are otherwise central for "re-embedding in all dimensions" (pp. 185f) after return.

furthermore sees the intersection of several factors, such as class, gender, age, and ethnicity as affecting one's embedding in society after deportation (p. 2). Preparation for one's return is thus of central importance (Flahaux et al., 2017, p. 1).<sup>10</sup> The lucky ones are those who are able to stay long enough to find a good job that enables them to remit money home and thus prepare the way for their return.

Salif and Karim had not been able to send or bring anything home in material terms. Committing themselves to work in agriculture was their last way out. However, their families enabled them to recover. Even though both had been unable to send gifts, they had kept up contact.<sup>11</sup> Kinship relations and the rural household served as their last refuge (Gaibazzi, 2015a, pp. 152f). The latter are put under particular pressure simultaneously, which forces them to "reconstruct" accordingly (cf. Carsten, 2004). Calenda illustrates how "half of the interviewees who did receive support [from their families] also experienced re-integration problems. Strong family expectations – e.g. of gifts, favors, financial support – constituted by far the major difficulty the returnees experienced" (Calenda, 2014b, p. 62). Accordingly, money is a central means both for leaving and for enabling a more dignified return, even if deported. Beyond the material aspect, it appears to be one's care for and presence among the family that count – something that I will analyze in more depth in the following section.

## Searching for money, "success," and the meaning of contributing

Primarily people say they are leaving in order "to search for money" (*warignini*), and "to succeed" ("*il faut réussir*"), even if other factors are involved. First of all, this should be treated as a discursive framing of the migration: it is considered a legitimate reason for going, as opposed, for example, to leaving because of family conflicts. Most of the former deportees I spoke to then named the existential and social needs of their kin, their everyday hardship and perceived powerlessness ("*c'était la misère ici*"; *fatagna*, *geleya*). For many who come from a low- to middle-class rural background and have little formal education, a job in the administration as a teacher or functionary, such as Salif's former classmates obtained, is often desired but usually unattainable. Even those who go to live in Bamako have the larger

10 Cassarino defines "preparedness" in terms of "willingness" and "readiness" (2004, p. 17). Collyer (2018) identifies three central factors: returnees' work experience and skills, their social capital, and their ability to plan their return (p. 123); for more on this subject see the concluding chapter.

11 According to Cliggett's work with Zambian migrants, contact with the family is the most important thing while they are away (2003, p. 544).



part of their family back in the village, like Brahima or Abdoulaye, whom I described before. Everyday hardship and a certain powerlessness (*fatagna*), as referred to above, have been discussed as existential conditions, characteristic of everyday life in Africa (e.g., Féliz & Rosenberg, 2017; Mahkulu et al., 2010; Chabal, 2009, pp. 150ff; Bruijn et al., 2007; Jackson, 2005a).

The repercussions of economic liberalization cause feelings of “abjection” (Ferguson, 2006, 1999) and becoming part of a “global precariat” (Standing, 2011). Schulz (2012) has elaborated on the Bamana term *geleya* recurring in daily conversations in Malian urban contexts, particularly since the devaluation of the FCFA referred to in Chapter 2, indicating “the emotional and material dimensions of the daily struggle to make a living”: “money affairs have become difficult” (*wari ko gèlèyara*), a shortage of money creates a general feeling of helplessness. Mbembe (cf. 2007; 2001) and Buggenhagen speak of a “moral crisis” (2012) even threatening the very basis of society.<sup>12</sup>

Eventually, all this leads back to a more general African discourse on “the fault of money,” referred to in the previous paragraph, and its absence as a cause of poverty and suffering, as one side of the coin. In conversations with respondents, a narrative presentation of this kind may additionally be fostered by the power discrepancies in our research setting, which are impossible to bridge (see Chapter 3). Back in the 1930s, Meyer Fortes, one of the pioneers of the anthropological study of West Africa, identified the reference to poverty in people’s self-representations as stereotypical (Fortes, 1936; cf. Ungruhe, 2010, p. 263); it was a practice that I found to be indeed widespread and conspicuous, and which could in itself suffice as a productive basis for analysis and insight. Clearly it cannot be denied that people live with, and leave as a result of, the existential and structurally induced need for a livelihood, as prominently discussed already. Obtaining money to care for one’s kin usually plays a primordial role in this; furthermore, it is a way out of the moral crisis mentioned.

Adama, whom I call the modest philosopher and artist of life in Bamako and who came originally from a small village on the Malian border with the Ivory Coast, brought all these aspects together in an exemplary way. He recalled his intention to leave his mother’s home when he was only 12 years old, back in 1984:

Adama: Everybody left because when there is no money, you have to leave.

Susanne: Was that the case for you too?

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12 Mbembe and Roitman moreover figure that “the crisis is exiled to the domain of the inexplicable” as the enduring crisis and the transformations going along with it “are not necessarily correlated to precise factors and historical referents, even if one is aware” of them (1995, p. 338).

Adama: Well I... I felt like leaving... It was also that I had to leave for elsewhere. Like my parents, everybody was in a terrible situation ("*étaient dans la galère*") (Adama, 1-7-2016).

Miserable poverty and a consequent need to contribute to the family were at the core. By that time, structural adjustment measures and privatizations were starting to have a negative effect. The downturn in agriculture that followed came after several droughts, in which the effects of climate change began to become slowly visible, while at the same time, the need for consumption started to rise and increased people's dependence on off-farm incomes (cf. Wooten, 2009).<sup>13</sup> Adama went on to describe his first years as an adventurer, mainly within the region:

Yes, I was young. Because I started with Burkina... And a very new bike... At that time, this bike signified a success! (*laughs*)

I did not even stay for two months before I left again ... I went off down there and stayed two or three years ... I returned. But since I have been leaving on adventures, I have barely stayed two, maximum three months in the village. When ... I come, I stay a little bit of time and I leave again. After I left for Senegal, I did not send any more news. In those days, there were no mobile phones. The people thought, maybe he is dead. It's embarrassing, when you don't have anything. Ah, it's not good if you don't have money, that's embarrassing. As if you didn't have a goal. (Adama, 1-7-2016)

Beyond the existential hardship of the family, which obviously required Adama's financial support, a new bike was the aim of his adventurous endeavor to *warig-nini*. Today it would be at least a motorbike, Adama laughs. These new signs of success and status go beyond the "traditional" aims of earning money for the bride price and contributing to the family livelihood (cf. Ungruhe, 2010). People want to buy, to construct and own the requirements for an increasingly modern life. Many simply state that there is no money where they are – particularly that income from agriculture can barely be monetized in light of low prices for surplus crops while the majority of the harvest serves for the subsistence of the family, without sufficing for the whole of the year.<sup>14</sup> In the city, people can run small businesses and do little jobs without much schooling (see further Chapter 6). "There is nothing here," was something I heard very often, and, more specifically, "there is no money in Mali." The latter reflected the then current feeling of increased uncertainty, crisis, and powerlessness caused by the Malian conflict. Mbembe speaks of an "incessant imperative to travel far away to earn money" (Mbembe, 2007, p. 305), even if money

13 Gaibazzi describes the differences between "for money" and "for life" production in a Gambian Soninké village (2015a, p. 143).

14 Usually additional grains need to be bought towards the end of the dry season; here for cash is needed.

itself has a “highly ambiguous image” (Schulz, 2002, p. 813). At the same time, schooling is seen by many as a mere delay.

The real economic conditions hardly enable anyone to make money in the village, but besides that according to local beliefs earning money on site is for strangers only and otherwise beneath one's dignity; to do it is thought to damage one's status as a person and impair one's honor (cf. Whitehouse, 2012; Jónsson, 2007). Jobs that are considered low-status and are assigned to strangers only can, however, be done elsewhere, in the city or abroad (Diawara, 2003a, p. 77). In fact, young men do engage in some economic activities on site, as many do not have the capacity or opportunity to leave, or the family may require them to stay, particularly in conditions post deportation (see further Chapter 6).

Even so, young men in particular have traditionally been expected to leave, not least in “functional” terms to learn how to become the head of a family, by knowing how to take decisions and lead and by being generally able to take care of things. For some, migration has also been a way to gain independence and escape from family pressure (de Haan & Rogaly, 2002, p. 7, cf. Koenig, 2005a, p. 80), to follow a certain lifestyle, to buy consumption goods, and eventually to achieve wealth for the family. In this sense, they learnt to remit from very early on (cf. Hertrich & Lesclingand, 2013, p. 181). Dolores Koenig observed: “While some elders ... showed concern about the timing of migration or the behavior of a particular migrant, they did not question the appropriateness of migration itself” (Koenig, 2005a, p. 80). Talking about his schoolfellows, Salif said that driving a motor to leave on an adventure is often said to be the mark of those “who have made it.”<sup>15</sup> This kind of comparison with one's neighbors can also be discussed alongside the concept of “relative deprivation”: proximity and perceived similarity are seen as key factors in the selection of a reference group for comparison of one's economic status (Stark & Taylor, 1989). When migration and mobility are seen as strategies to improve one's life chances, as long as social inequalities persist, relative deprivation may be a motor for expectations of migrating and achieving something. As a successful migrant, one can form part of the transnational exchange and remittance economy and build even more powerful networks of support. Meanwhile, the realization of a migratory adventure itself has become a highly expensive endeavor, often achievable only with the help of social networks and relations. Moreover, the probability of success has decreased substantially through externalized borders and migratory restrictions making migratory “failures” much more common.

Most people are webbed into a dense cluster of social relations and networks that require constant reciprocal exchanges. “If you have money, you can support everybody,” Yakouba's uncle claims in the sense of Marshall Sahlin's concept of “gen-

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15 The notions of envy and jealousy are at the heart of the migratory adventure and link to old notions of Mandé as I will show in the next section.

eralized reciprocity" (1965), a relation where everything circulates freely to eventually balance out all accounts, even if that may be particularly difficult between parents and children.<sup>16</sup> Money is part of everyday relations, not only in the villages in the south of Mali to ensure the intimate ties between a son and his mother, but also in the much more generalized reciprocity that is practiced between neighbors, friends, and also absent migrants. Relationships are constituted through exchanges of money and gifts, particularly in times of crisis (cf. Buggenhagen, 2012). Not only elder brothers, but also fathers and uncles or mothers and aunts may contribute to one's adventurous journey or to building up a business or funding any other activity, as much as they can. These contributions are sometimes mentioned by the way in the respondents' narrations, as if they formed part of an exchange that could be taken for granted. Otherwise, not taking over one's "care duties at certain life stages would be interpreted as an expression of disrespect or personal failure" (Alber & Drotbohm, 2015, p. 11).

Former deportees often claim that they decided to leave by themselves, after informing a hierarchically higher male relative. In fact, the family head may no longer be able to support their journeys as was previously the case. This renders the son's adventure economically even more important for the family, while imbuing it with more familial and potentially moral power. The intergenerational conflicts this may generate will be discussed in the next chapter. Given the idea that the individual serves the collective good, a person's wealth lies in his or her labor and capacity to contribute: wealth has, therefore, long been considered to consist in people (Meillassoux, 1981), and not in land, though access to land used to be easy (cf. Lentz, 2006).<sup>17</sup> In the end, people can obtain money, realize projects and become someone, which is what wealth is considered to be in current terms. This powerful institutionalization makes some even sneak out through "abrupt departures" (Koenig, 2005a, p. 89) without telling anybody. Usually, these endeavors have not created major constraints, at least not in the cases reported to me. The son's autonomous decision rather links in with the concept of an adventure as a project towards man- and adulthood. As a self-evident and necessary component of family livelihoods and embedded in the broader household strategy (cf. Massey et al., 1993, pp. 436ff; cf. Chapter 2), however, plans, to (re-)emigrate, can be refused by the family head as well (Koenig, 2005a, pp. 88f). Preferences for staying

16 Mauss realized earlier that some relationships never balance out, e.g., between a mother and a child. In the form of an "alternating reciprocity" one repays one's parents by having children oneself (cf. Graeber, 2011, p. 91; 405n.21).

17 Land is likewise attached through people and labor (Shipton, 2006, pp. 229f). This is admittedly a rather simplistic presentation, as access to and possession of land have been shaped by a multiplicity of historical and current processes and experiments since the colonialization of property rights and the colonists' local handling of complex symbolic, material, and spiritual meanings (Lentz, 2013; Shipton, 2009, 2006; cf. also Whitehouse, 2012).

or leaving, particularly within family contexts, are hard to disentangle: "individual agency ... remains a perplexing area" (Carling & Schewel, 2017, p. 14). Through deportations the reciprocity enabled by the migratory adventure is endangered. What this "shortage of money" eventually implies for familial and social relations will be developed in what follows.

## Social and familial renegotiations and positioning post deportation

Even if the traumatic experiences of the journey hit hard and cause sensations of restlessness for both young and older deportees, it is the loss of money, expressed in the emblematic phrase "returning with empty hands" in its material, but more than that in its symbolic dimension, which substantially impacts the individual and his or her relatives. It further leads into the core of the social situation post deportation and its essential ambivalence.

### On shame and "*fa den sago*"

All the deportees described so far demonstrated feelings and uttered expressions of shame and embarrassment as a result of, as they say, not having "found" money yet or, more importantly, having lost it. Many shy away from returning to their parents' village. Salif and Karim were unable to sleep. Others, restlessly again, took the hazardous route to the north, like Souleymane or Madou in the previous chapter, in order to achieve their objective. According to Scheff (2003), shame appears the moment one does not conform to an expected role, as when "seeing one's self negatively from the point of view of the other" (Scheff, 2003, p. 247, building on Cooley (1922) and Darwin (1872)). Deportees such as Karim or Salif were far from conforming to the obvious expectations of returning "successfully" and fulfilling the role of the adult son by taking care of the family. Worse than that, one may be left debased, traumatized, and with one's honor and dignity impaired. Deportees often use *maloya* to describe their sensation of shame to which I gave a prominent place in my introduction to this study and my discussion of potential "failure." Salif speaks of "*la honte*" (see Chapter 4), the French translation of *maloya*. The Bambara expression *maloya*, usually translated as "shame," but also as being shy or embarrassed (Adama used the French equivalent – *c'est gênant*), is one of the most important principles in Mandé societies to indicate correct behavior (cf. Brand, 2001, p. 16). First of all, it has a socially preserving function and also a positive connotation. Moreover, *maloya* is sign of nobility (*hòrònw*) and separates free people from slaves, who are said

to have no shame (ibid.).<sup>18</sup> Thus feeling shame is considered as something positive and status-enhancing. The shame returnees talk about as a threat to their sense of self is thus of an ambivalent and very particular kind. As a sentiment central to keeping society together, shame may prevent one from returning home to save not only one's face, but also the reputation of the entire family. As "the master emotion of everyday life" (Scheff, 2003, p. 256), shame is key to understanding social life and relations, although it may be only a minor threat to the (social) bond. Most importantly, though, anticipated shame is continuously present in almost all social interactions (ibid.), and this conception of shame fits in well here as, in Mandé, relationships are of primordial relevance for human being and personhood:

In Mandé, relations exist prior to the person: it is only by means of social ties that one can achieve personhood. An isolated individual does not have the slightest significance socially, and economically a life without social relations is not viable either: relations are important sources of information, resources and support (Brand, 2001, p. 14).

These norms and ideas of respectability and central relatedness in the conception of (masculine) personhood are hegemonic notions around which Mandé society is organized and to which it adheres. They imply a positive debt, in the sense of a "debt of life" (Latour, 2003, p. 186), or "family debt" (Mbembe, 2007, p. 28) toward one's close relations and the primordial and general reciprocity described before, not least as these norms help to constitute the social fabric and social cohesion. In the African context, one can speak of multiple forms of debt or "indebtedness" (Shipton, 2006) in social (as well as economic) relations, which signify something positive and productive, as will be shown.

Individual happiness and affluence, social harmony and the respect of others are thus only possible through compliance with socially prescribed roles (Brand, 2001, p. 134). Consequently, one can only be a respected and upright person in relation to and in the eyes of others (pp. 14f).<sup>19</sup> Ideals of masculinity are usually determined by respect (*bonya*) and commonly established modes of joking (*senankuya*) between different social and ethnic groups, built on the assumption of an unchallenged authority. Money allows one to be a respected son, friend, and father. Against this background, the loss of money puts one in danger of serious disgrace

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18 According to this belief, slaves would not be able to distinguish, and thus apply, the social rules of correct behavior established for the nobility, who preserve respect and their honor accordingly. Among themselves, however, slaves are able to display shame, which enables them also to discuss issues that may not be confronted by noblemen (Brand, 2001, p. 16 n 13).

19 Even if there are fewer situations considered shameful for a man than for a woman in Mandé, "the consequences of disgrace are said to be more serious to men than to women" (Brand, 2001, p. 18).

particularly as “a man”: “one has not made it” (*“on a pas réussi”*) refers to this hegemonic foil. In the end it was anxiety about not conforming to the expected role in others’ eyes that drove Karim and others to stay away from their village in order to save face, a good name (*tôgò nyuman*), and positive social recognition (cf. Steuer, 2012). Literature suggests this is tantamount to the fear of social death (Bredeloup, 2017; Lucht, 2017).<sup>20</sup> All these conceptions merge in the expression *fa den sago* that may be applied to people after deportation. It means “the capacity of one’s will, desire or aspiration is suspended or has stopped.” In its social dimension this may have dramatic consequences. Broulaye, Salif’s neighbor, explained the meaning of money in supposed “failed” adventures as follows:

If you return without money, you may be called lazy (*fa den sago*). The idea is that you are not someone who fights, as if you do not have any ambitions anymore, as if you are an individual without heart. That means that you don’t want to go there (*“là-bas”*) that you don’t want to succeed. And your mother gets criticized too, yeah, yeah... That’s what may be being said among the half-brothers or cousins: you don’t want to get on; you don’t want to work. You can’t cope with possible difficulties. (Broulaye, 11-7-2015)

Laziness is a summarizing term for *fa den sago*. Underlying it is the idea of an incomplete person without heart and soul. At its center, *fa den sago* refers to the social dimension and relatedness of the person, and thus to the expectations attaching to a person’s actions for the common good. As in Mandé relatedness comes prior to the person, questioning one’s will to be active is questioning one’s integrity as a good member of society. *Fa den sago* is made up of the Bambara expressions *fa den*, which literally translates as “child of the same father,” but also means “jealousy” (as in the sense of *fadenya*); and *sago*, which means will and desire. Consequently, *fa den sago* signifies that the will of the father’s children or, better, of his family, is not fulfilled. This intrinsically relates to the social expectations of migratory success as far as the kin are concerned being literally left unfulfilled by one’s monetary loss through deportation. In fact, *fa den sago* is a narrative depiction of social death. It is against this background that Adama preferred his parents to think he was dead rather than stopping to try to find money, being embarrassed and unable to alleviate his parents’ poverty; at the same time, it is to guard one’s respect and sense of self. While away, many did not call their families to avoid telling them about their complicated situation.

Broulaye was surprisingly open in commenting on others’ situations and positions after deportation. He had left for Libya to continue on to Europe, but had

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20 Sylvie Bredeloup speaks of the “anguish of returning empty-handed,” as the “anxiety of facing others and their views, of humiliating one’s relatives because of one’s failure” (Bredeloup, 2017, p. 147).

returned. Even if he could not prepare as he would have wished, he had been able to save some money. Most significantly, he decided to return of his own volition. The most important elements that contribute to a more successful reintegration seem to be retaining one's autonomy and dignity. So Broulaye seemed to speak from a place where he was not in danger of being accused of laziness or "failure." Karim, on the other hand, did not leave the family compound during one entire month: "I could not leave as I did not return with anything. ... I was anxious. The people could not ask me for money as they knew that I had come with empty hands." Beyond the family, he feared the villagers' malicious talk. Everybody knew that he had come back penniless. Some people are reported to have been rejected by their communities (cf. Tounkara, 2013), but these need to be seen as extreme cases as mentioned above (see Chapter 1).

Even if Yakouba was able to partially prepare for and embed his return socially and financially, he went to the family hamlet some kilometers outside the village immediately after his return. He wanted to engage in some agricultural work, which "needed to be done immediately." At the same time, hamlets in the countryside are spaces out of sight of the extended family and other villagers and far from their observing eyes and talk. They provide a certain kind of privacy and autonomy, and thus the possibility of recovering from a state of disturbance after a deportation. For Karim, it was the people who were close to him socially, who helped him out of his desperation: "My friends visited me to chat. It was they who made me, little by little, go outside the family compound. From time to time, we went for a walk. After that, it also worked with the others." There seem to be different social dynamics at stake in getting on with the situation after deportation. The questions of social distance or proximity as well as who to trust and to rely on, all relate to kinship relations, friendship and importantly the broader village population, literally the eyes of the others. I will do a breakdown of them in the next section.

### **Ambivalent (intimate) relations post deportation**

Karim and his brother were our hosts in the village. We were accommodated in the ample courtyard, placed very prominently, sleeping in the most modern house that Mamoutou had constructed. Karim's brother had climbed up the social ladder and become mayor in his home community. He was oftentimes away taking care of his family in Bamako or participating in meetings. Karim, Birama, and I spent a lot of time together. Unlike his brother, Karim was calm and reserved. He warmed up and became more open, particularly as his elder brother was absent. After his deportation, Karim was the formal head of the family ("*chef de la famille*"; *sòtigi*). Mamoutou was living in another region. Karim's father wished him to stay and take care of them. "I would have left again otherwise," he says. "My brother cannot



financially support his family [in Bamako] and back home.” Karim signaled his responsibility and desire to contribute. By staying, he was able to guarantee the continuity of the family compound and farm. In the meantime, their father died, and Mamoutou became family head on his return as mayor. Importantly, Karim’s deportation and financial loss apparently did not translate into a loss of status for the family. Both Karim and Salif became (interim) household heads. Still, Karim depended on others’ financial support, including that of his elder brother.

Brothers are said to play a central role in hegemonic conceptions in Mandé. Through all the stages of migration and return, respondents reported that their brothers supported them by lending money, providing accommodation, and acting as a friend or a communicator with the rest of the family. Yet, as intimate family members, brothers may, in fact, have an ambivalent role. Salif’s neighbor Broulaye explained this specific relationship:

For example, certain elder brothers finance the journeys of their younger brothers. So, if the younger brothers don’t succeed in entering [Europe], their elder brothers are upset. They can blame the little brothers for being lazy (“*fainéant*”). But that’s not exactly it. Everybody has his destiny. Such accusations often make return migrants and *refoulés* see themselves as obliged to try to re-emigrate to be able to find the money to refund the money from the elder brother. On the other hand, others tell the *refoulés* that it’s not that serious, and that the essential thing is to be in good health – so that they can still work to earn. (Broulaye, 11-7-2015)

Lack of success, again equated with laziness and justifying anger at the younger brother, who “failed” even though he had support, leaves the latter vulnerable to being pushed to set off again, financially indebted to the elder brother. Mamoutou, Karim’s brother, may have been disappointed as well, but he received his brother openly and supported him while the latter recovered. According to Yakouba’s mother’s report and Salif, people are often simply relieved and grateful that the returnee has come back healthy and alive. Yakouba, though, was not very happy when the cousin he had funded to join him in Libya was also deported afterwards. This social space of negotiation is a good example of the difficulties inherent in “failed” adventures that potentially compromise the entire family. Still, the most important thing is that one survives as a person to go on and thereby contribute, the neighbor concludes. The returnee is obviously not socially dead in these cases. Moreover, in saying “that’s not exactly it,” Broulaye is referring to a widespread notion from cosmology and ultimate sense making: in the end, everything is part of one’s destiny, which it is still possible to activate through one’s commitment (see Chapter 7 for more on this topic).

Broulaye illustrated a specific relational ambivalence<sup>21</sup> caused by the situation of the forced return. It relates to more general constructions of social relations, and Mandé conceptions in particular. Despite all "defeats" there is a sort of self-evident solidarity and support in intimate kin relations. While the individual family is existentially and economically impaired by the brother's, son's, or nephew's unexpected loss, the supposed intimate kin relations are obliged, and privileged, to offer loyalty and internal support to a certain extent (cf., e.g., Jackson, 2017, pp. 103ff). The rupture through deportation puts these hegemonic conceptions and intimate relations particularly to the test. Literature underlines that close social relations, intimacy, and money are uncertain (cf., e.g., Geschiere, 2013; Graeber, 2011; Parry & Bloch, 1989) and fraught with ambivalence (Jackson, 2017). While kinship may carry an "axiom of amity," according to Meyer Fortes, a Tallensi proverb suggests "familiarity is better than kinship" (1949), even if both may overlap substantially (cf. Jackson, 2017, pp. 131ff). Keith Hart (1988) concludes that it is easier to trust friends in economic relations than one's kin ("as friends are free," p. 189).<sup>22</sup> In this uncertain terrain, "losing" money is in either case a tricky, and, above all, a morally loaded issue.

Brothers are constructed as playing antagonistic parts in polygynous families, in everyday life as well as in migration. This centers around the concepts of *fadenya* and *badenya* (cf., e.g., Bredeloup, 2017; Jackson, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015a; Jónsson, 2007; Jansen, 1996; Bird & Kendall, 1980). *Fadenya*, literally translated as "rivalry, jealousy, and antagonism," is said to generate opposition among children with the same father but with different mothers, and particularly among brothers, driving young men to engage in heroic actions in order to stand out. The elder brother is usually placed higher in the family hierarchy. Jealousy is a strong tool of autonomy here. As already said, envy of others' successes and achievements is a primary motor for leaving. *Badenya*, by contrast, refers to children of the same mother (*ba*) and is a metaphor for harmony, more likely to stimulate people to accept their situation and the constraints imposed, for instance, by the authorities. These concepts are to be understood within the embedding context of the polygynous household, where co-wives have to compete for often scarce material resources and personal favors as well as specific blessings and care. These derive from the patrilineal line through the children and their father (cf. Jackson, 2017, pp. 146f). Thus, the social standing

21 According to Monika Palmberger (2019), the term "relational ambivalence" defines ambivalence "as a product of relationships individuals engage in" (p. 14). This fits well into the context under discussion, where people consider themselves not as having relationships but as being relationships. (See further Chapter 8).

22 Friends may not be directly affected, and reciprocity may be even more of an issue of negotiation. Marcel Mauss (1954) calls friends "the true locus of society" (Hart, 1986, p. 189). However, in a moment of crisis, friends may slip away more easily, while family members have a certain obligation to bond and belong (cf. Jackson, 2017, pp. 103f).

of the mother is intrinsically connected to the migratory success of the son, due to society's attachment to migration.<sup>23</sup>

From the perspective of *fadenya*, Karim left on an adventure in order to seek independence, manhood, and the capacity to contribute to the family vis-à-vis his elder brother. Mamoutou supported him to achieve this aim. Mandé discourse implies the younger brother has to leave the paternal compound in case of conflict and become autonomous. The younger brother is envisaged as returning successfully as a potentially violent stranger or hunter to replace the elder brother as the compound chief, when he needs support or replacement: the "hero is welcomed only on troubled days" (Jansen, 1996, p. 681, after Johnson, 1986, p. 42). Neither Karim nor Salif returned as a hero or successful adventurer. Contrariwise, it was again their elder brothers who had to help them out, thus reasserting the hierarchy between the brothers. Still, both were welcomed, not only as survivors of their adventures, but also economically for guaranteeing the continuity of the paternal compound. Formally, both had attained social adulthood many years before, but had to face up to their inability to participate in reciprocal exchange on every level. This created tensions within their financial and social expectations and relations. Both Salif and Karim complained about their economic constraints, and Karim led a humble life in comparison to his successful brother. Mamoutou took care of Karim and restored his morale even if the fact that they have different mothers, but the same father, would suggest they might compete according to *fadenya*. Even so, this may have added substantially to Karim's sensation of being left behind. Kinship seems to keep its promise of amity and care, by serving as refuge and savior (cf. also Wiedemann, 2018) – despite potential rivalries, the preservation of hierarchies as well as the ambivalence between obligations, (be)longing, and expectations (unfulfilled). Still, such situations remain precarious and need to be dealt with, particularly when it comes to the broader social and village context.

### Revisiting the social order – talking or not talking

Everyday gossip and talking about other people is a constitutive part of everyday life in southern Mali, particularly in small-scale communities or defined groups (which may also include civil society, as described above). Many of the respondents spoke about having been mocked after their return, mockery being understood as some kind of by-product. Brahim faced substantial mistrust and alienation in the market place in Bamako (see Chapter 4). People did not know what he had been doing abroad, which gave them a reason for suspicion. "It is obvious who is a deportee,"

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23 For example, if the son of one co-wife migrates, the other co-wife would do everything to enable her son to leave as well (cf. also Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 134). An opposing discourse implies that the mother is left alone when the son departs.

said Salif's neighbor Broulaye describing the situation. "People may even call out *'refoulé, refoulé'* in broad daylight and point a finger at you." He laughed about the open shaming as he talked. "And then they denounce your mother," he says pointing out the probably most crucial connection. An open acknowledgement of one's supposed "failure" may even reinforce the shame of returning empty-handed (Vermont, 2015), which is "aggravated by the public ridicule" (Kleist, 2017b, p. 184). This has to do not only with the (intimate) family; whether the broader community talks – either openly or behind one's back – or does not talk is central as well. Mockery can sometimes be directed against one's close family as well oneself, though, besides shaming, it may at the same time have a correcting and preserving function.

### Gossiping and mothers' roles in the adventurer's success

According to George Paul Meiu, talking about the others mainly serves to determine what it means to be a good member of society: "gossip, rumoring and scandal are central modes for the production and alteration of belonging" (Meiu, 2017, p. 149).<sup>24</sup> While on the one hand it is argued that gossip serves to preserve the "unity" of a group (cf. Gluckman, 1963) (which is in line with the preserving function of shame mentioned above), it is additionally "a way of dealing with emerging conflicts and contradictions and generating intimate alliances against oppressive political and economic hierarchy" (cf. Meiu, 2017, p. 149). Deportations, as we have already indicated, bring about substantial conflicts and contradictions in social worlds. Niko Besnier (2009) emphasizes that the real and substantial consequences of gossip for people should be considered as well as its power as a political tool. In this sense, gossip can actively reshape social worlds.<sup>25</sup> It works like an "indirect dialogue" about norms, values, and thus existing hierarchies in a kind of "semi-public sphere" beyond the usual "face-to-face situation" (Pietilä, 2007). Sooner or later, a person or group that is gossiped about usually learns what is being said about

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24 In George Meiu's examples of young rural Kenyan men (Morans) seasonally working as beach boys to become "young big [rich] men" through transactional sexual relationships with white western women, it is not financial loss but so-called "shortcut money" that causes villagers' malicious talk about the "evil" and transient nature of immoral earnings. But rather than simply insulting the young Morans, young women also use gossip to express their fascination with and desire for them, which can eventually lead to secret love affairs; a similar ambivalence is expressed by other young men in search of income opportunities and upward mobility, for whom the young Morans represent aspirational idols. While the young men are in one way emasculated through gossip, they become masculine in other ways by this practice (Meiu, 2017, pp. 148ff).

25 Besnier's (2009) illuminating study based on 40 years of field work on a small Pacific island shows that gossip has not just the abstract function of social control of morality but real consequences for people: gossip is shaped by sociocultural processes that involve the community as a whole; it forms part of hegemonic discourses and the opposition to them.

them. Besides its preserving function, gossip can thus effect change of behavior and “review the order of things” (cf. also Drotbohm, 2010, p. 54).<sup>26</sup>

“People’s mocking should not be taken too seriously,” said Broulaye explaining his amusement at people’s reaction to a *refoulé*’s return. His explanation comes as a surprise and might rather have indicated his own embarrassment vis-à-vis me with regard to such behavior: principally, joking relationships (*senankuya*) in Mandé allow mockery, accusations, and also harsh critique under the umbrella of mutual amusement and pre-established bonds. Such relationships can also consist in institutionalized social behavior to cope with forms of loss.<sup>27</sup> But, it would be difficult to characterize mocking *refoulés* and gossiping about them as features of joking relationships. The latter are a specific institution in multi-hierarchical Mandé societies, creating a field free from rivalry by assigning specific joking partners (cf. Brand, 2001, pp. 16ff). Mocking and gossiping on the other hand are fully power-loaded, rather enforcing old hierarchies or generating new ones.

The most important role played by mothers is in the gossip of the village population or social circle after a deportation: as Broulaye reported above, “and the mother gets criticized too, yeah, yeah.” Such resigned and seemingly careless acknowledgement of this everyday reality hints at a connection which needs to be carefully analyzed, primarily in order to understand the specific dynamics of gossip, talk, and silence in this context. Eventually, it is the mother, who is in danger of being blamed for the adventurer’s breakdown, which could potentially imply his social death (*fa den sago*). Broulaye explains:

If a migrant returns with sufficient means, people say that his mother is a kind person, who respects her husband. But the migrants who have not brought anything back are criticized by certain villagers as if their mother had been malicious. That’s a frequent criticism here in the village. (Broulaye, 11-7-2015)

The criticism that calls the mother into account is not expressed in front of the person concerned, but done secretly instead, Broulaye continues. Otherwise, it would engender conflict. In this way, social harmony can be preserved, he is convinced. Against this background, silence, non-communication, or limited communication appear strong tools to cope with the reactions to an unsuccessful return. “I did not say anything,” “we did not talk about it” are frequently a part of narrations. Often,

26 Importantly, gossip is not only constitutive of the person who is gossiped about, but also of those who sit together and chat, as it creates a space of trust and “truthfulness” (Drotbohm, 2010, p. 54).

27 Michael Jackson depicts ritualized forms of mourning and grief, as having to do not only with the death of a person, but with losses of objects, homelands and ideals, enabling others to contemplate them together with the person immediately affected and thus to relieve them – through shared suffering – from the privatization of pain, and at the same time contribute to reconstituting the social order (Jackson, 2017, pp. 73ff).

there is one person of trust who can be spoken to intimately, a brother, as in the cases of Salif and Karim, an uncle, or a very close friend. While Karim was eventually led back into village life by his trusting friends, Salif remained silent: "Here? ... No...." Salif never said anything about the difficulties of the journey, prison, deaths at sea, and his deportation:

Here it's difficult because you cannot tell it with your own mouth because the people know quite well that you've done six months in prison and that you went in the Zodiac<sup>28</sup>, but they want you to tell them yourself; otherwise, you'll be a liar and they will announce it everywhere. They will also say that the difficulties you had on your adventure or when you were deported, were the fault of your mother, because she did not obey her husband. That's why one does not talk about the difficulties of the journey. So, if you succeed you tell people, and if you don't succeed you say nothing. Our life is difficult, because everything depends on your mother; everything you have will be owing to your mother (*bè bi ba bolo*). (Salif, 11-1-2015)

Even if the people around him knew something of the trouble he had had, he would not spell it out openly. The moment Salif started to lament the difficulties he had experienced, he would be accused of being a liar, he reasoned – as if admitting "failure" would destroy the collective image of success and adventure. Instead of entering the quagmire of the village rumors, potentially damaging not only his own reputation, but, more importantly, that of his mother, Salif preferred to remain silent, if only to deprive them of any reason for calling him a liar. This was a measure taken to save face and maintain respect for himself and his mother. One AME staff member similarly admitted, "This suffering that you have been through, you cannot talk about it" (field notes, 10-28-2015). Salif never said anything to his mother himself. It was his brother who passed on some bits and pieces of information. The same applied to his first wife with whom he had already had five children before setting out on his journey. Both mother and wife had been greatly in favor of Salif's quest for money. Fatoumata, his wife, smiles: "Yes, I was very happy, when he got back. But when I heard people speaking about the deaths at sea and that he suffered in prison, I did not like this at all." The villagers' gossip, based on hearsay, informed her about the circumstances of her husband's suffering abroad.

The background for such gossip is the primordial relevance of the relationship between mothers and children in Mandé. Not only do mothers evoke the profoundest feelings of respect, but a certain complicity is assumed between children and their mothers. Once grown-up, sons in a patrilocal and polygynous household are expected to take care of their mothers (Brand, 2001, p. 17), who brought them into the world and took care of them through every essential step in their lives. One's

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28 Small rubber boat, see Chapter 1.

mother's social standing and blessing are considered the keys to personal success – in the adventure too, as revealed above. Similarly, in terms of *badenya*, they are relevant to the success of the community as well (p. 21). All this is condensed in the Bambara expression *bè bi ba bolo* that Salif referred to and that translates as “everyone is in the hands of their mother (*ba*).”<sup>29</sup> It reflects the Mandé belief that gains as well as losses are related to and explained by one's mother's behavior, good or bad. The supposed strong bond between mother and son can have very negative repercussions on the outcome of a son's bid for success. According to Salif:

The moment you return, people say bad words about your mother. When anyone gets to Libya or Spain, people say that their mother is good, because her child has crossed the sea or the Sahara without dying. So if such a person returns, their mother is bad, that's what the people say. ... So, if you cross, your mother is good; if you return, your mother is bad. (Salif, 11-1-2015)

Whatever kind of behavior the child displays, the mother is indirectly made responsible for it in everyday small talk, and her reputation suffers or improves by turns. If an adventurer is successful, it may even increase people's envy and jealousy. “Our life is difficult,” is how Salif evaluated this moral economy relating to the migratory adventure with the mother at its social core, while my co-researcher Birama sat next to me and laughed, bitter and amused at the same time. Salif was describing a hegemonic discourse and everyday practice that I often encountered during my fieldwork: something an outsider might dismiss as mere superstition is the firm local belief of many and may involve severe consequences for the individuals concerned. Not obeying or disrespecting one's husband<sup>30</sup> is considered grounds for severe reproach as it fundamentally undermines the husband's personhood. A refusal to have sexual intercourse would endanger social reproduction and thus the future of the family line, and can be a powerful tool for women, particularly in polygynous constellations. Broulaye remained vague and diplomatic regarding his opinion of mothers' bad faith, which eventually saved his face as well: “Well, I agree that the woman should respect her husband in the correct way; the children they will have will be blessed.” Unlike his father, Karim's mother had severe difficulties in accepting her son's “failure”: “That's because women love their children so much,” he reasoned.<sup>31</sup>

29 In French: “*Chacun est dans les mains de sa mère*”. Brand, e.g., notes that no one can “go beyond his mother” (2001, pp. 147f).

30 In Bambara: *fourou mouso mi tè à fourou tiè bognan or fourou mouso mi tè à fourou tiè kouman kan sabati*.

31 Tellingly, hardly anyone would acknowledge that his own mother had been the subject of gossip. If they admitted anything, it would only be having heard of someone's mother who was.

Women, notably as wives and mothers, are points of reference for various stories in gossip, but also for common beliefs and sayings.<sup>32</sup> Not least, such beliefs should be understood as conveying an implicit fear of women, their existential and creative powers, particularly birth-giving women and their bodies (cf. Ba, 2015). These are part of discourses where women engage with occult powers associated with the bush (*“la brousse”*) as the domain of sorcery. In this vein, “misbehaving” women can be perceived as threats to the stability of the community (*badenya*) and the social order (Jansen, 1996, p. 680) that they are supposed to guarantee.<sup>33</sup> In the end, gossip about an adventurer’s mother can be seen as a measure to ensure the community’s social integrity. Women become suspect at the moment of their son’s unwanted and supposedly unsuccessful return. This clearly goes beyond Meiu’s discussion of ambiguously successful Samburu men, where mothers are not mentioned any further for their role in everyday gossiping. The fact of mothers’ constituting a central theme of everyday gossip under post-deportation conditions, underlines their centrality in the maintenance of social well-being and social order at least; they are highly admired and redoubtable at the same time.

### The power of silence

Silence was not only described as a widespread behavior after deportation, in our conversations too people would suddenly stop talking, their voices would become bitter, or they would find an excuse to change the subject or stroll away. As I have said, not everything can be expressed in words. Traumatic experiences play a role in this, but the shame of not having made it and the money lost in the eyes of the others seem to count more, even if we are speaking of a particular and also positive form of shame here. Plambech (2017, p. 150) speaks of the “sealed lips” phenomenon after deportations. Silence seems to have multiple functions. Silence (*fo ye ma fo* [literally “not greeting”] or *ka mougnon*) and silences (Jansen, 2005, p. 334) in Mandé are, among other things, said to have a preserving function in the light of shame and to maintain respect (cf., e.g., Schulz, 2012, 2005; Jansen, 2005; Diawara, 2003b; Brand, 2001). Accordingly, controlling one’s emotions and saving

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32 Heike Drotbohm confirms with others that gossip stories very often include a gender-specific connotation (2010, p. 54).

33 In patriarchal societies, witchcraft is usually associated with dark spiritual female power (cf. Jackson, 2017, pp. 120ff). Jansen (1996) explains women’s relation to sorcery in Mandé oral tradition through their mobility: after marriage a woman moves out of her paternal or brother’s compound to her husband’s. In the process she crosses the bush and arrives as a stranger in her husband’s village (cf. Van Hoven & Oosten and Jansen 1996, p. 680). Women’s agency may be hidden as much as possible, but everybody is aware of women’s secret strategies and power (to manipulate). As long as women do not openly threaten the social order, though, nobody will stop them (Brand, 2001, p. 154).



face, as Salif did, are honorable and desirable actions in circumstances where affect is seldom expressed openly (Brand, 2001, pp. 16ff).

From an analysis of the Bosnian civil war, Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2012) highlight different agentic functions of silence, among other things “to protect social relations and affirm a sense of normal life” and as “a way of protesting and making claims, especially from a marginalized position” (pp. 506ff).<sup>34</sup> This agentic conceptualization of silence fits our context well: through silences people navigate the precarious social field post deportation. Silences may allow a mutually respectful cohabitation to continue in spite of traumatic memories and demoralizations. Lately, silence has received increasing attention in the discussion of kinship relations, of belonging and relatedness. Heike Drotbohm identifies silence as a productive activity, which defines the in- and outside of intimacy.<sup>35</sup> In that sense, Salif preserved and delimited the intimate relationship with his mother through not speaking. This may have also allowed a conspiratorial silence between the two.

The villagers' hegemonic gossip and talk about loss of money generate new hardships and contingencies after deportations. Contrary to the preserving function of silence, speaking about others not only shames them, but can intrinsically harm their well-being (Meiu, 2017, pp. 169f). In this light, mockery of and gossiping about “failed” adventurers and their mothers are particularly powerful acts and signal a warning review of the order of things. Likewise, they can be seen as an outcry against the direful political and social realities brought about by migratory restrictions and deportations. In contrast, within ambivalent family and neighbor contexts, actively keeping silent may be an even more effective “power element” (Drotbohm, 2010, p. 65) to preserve and potentially influence kinship relations as well as the moral and social integrity and order under review. Speaking and not speaking constitute effective social tools, which are mutually interdependent. Mamadou Diawara sees “the Empire of the Word” as the counterpart of silence “on both an ontological level and as a hegemonic *social configuration*” (Jansen, 2005, p. 334; cf. Diawara, 2003b, p. 285). His complex analysis of silences in Mandé builds on the Bamana proverb “*la silence est l'aîné de la parole*” (“silence is the elder brother of speech”). This sets silence hierarchically above speech, which links in with Mandé values of not speaking and respect which are inherent in the concept of *maloya*, eventually.

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34 Eastmond and Mannergren Selimovic (2012) conceptualize silence broadly as “a form of social communication that is as rich and multifaceted as speech and narration. ... There are great cultural variations, ... in the valuation and uses of silence in human interaction, including as a means to approach sensitive or potentially disruptive subjects” (pp. 505f).

35 See conference report online: <http://affective-societies.de/2017/aus-der-forschung/the-prize-of-belonging>, accessed 31 October 2021.

Gossip and silence after deportations thus seem to reconstitute each other in a kind of productive exchange and complementation. While the reality is highly morally loaded, socially and economically complex, silence and gossiping are ways to get around the loss of money and the difficulties of contributing as expected. Both try to preserve social relations and their order, but at the same time to challenge them, giving space to renegotiate kin, friendship and broader social relations in the village or the neighborhood, along practices of distancing and proximity, intimacy and withdrawal. The mother's position at the center of these practices of gossiping and silence perhaps expresses the intrinsic fear of a deterioration of the social order induced by deportations and migratory "failures" most notably. Simultaneously, knowledge of the hazards of the journey as well as the frequency of deportations has substantially changed over time. Behavior towards and acceptance of *refoulés* have been similarly impacted. The women in Yakouba's family compound, for instance, reported that they had heard from other villagers about the journey's difficulties and possible hardships; dramatic depictions on the radio and television also alerted them. The new "normalcy" of deportations (cf. Galvin, 2015) and migratory constraints has created collectivities of deportees in the villages around, where memories of the journey and sufferings are shared. There seems to be more openness towards such "failures" even if the loss of money, and the consequent difficulty of achieving wealth and becoming someone, constitutes the "real" drama of return. I will further develop these aspects in the chapters that follow.

### **The ambivalent role of money and debt under post-deportation conditions**

I started with the observation that everything seems to be about money, in order to find out more about its social meaning in conditions post deportation. It has become clear that there is not one meaning of money or its loss; rather there are multiple ones which are situationally defined and constantly renegotiated (Parry & Bloch, 1989, p. 23; cf. also Appadurai, 1986), as well as fundamentally questioned and put under constraint by the rupture of deportation. The primordial difference that money makes is to be seen rather in its symbolic value and related reciprocal obligations. More than that, following Parry and Bloch, the symbolism of money may be regarded as only one aspect of a more general symbolic world of transactions (not necessarily monetary or economic), which relate to "some absolutely fundamental human problems" (Parry & Bloch, 1989, p. 28). In conclusion, I want to reflect from a theoretical point of view, on the social repercussions of money loss, which has so far only been discussed in relation to its multiple forms of debt and social obligations.

## Revisiting the meaning of money, potential debts and reciprocities

“It’s only money that counts here, not the age anymore, nor the wisdom.” A former deportee from Libya is depicting a radical world, thoroughly monetized and commodified, seemingly cold, brutal, and distant, turbo capitalist, neglecting “traditional” values and indicators of respect in West Africa, towards older men in particular – that is, if we take this quote literally, out of context. Throughout the chapter, I have developed the dense web of social relations that factually embeds deportees, observes them, comments on them, and engages in their life after deportation. Despite the danger of being called *fa den sago* – the equivalent of a social death sentence – people do eventually return and go on. They have taken over moral and social responsibilities and obligations “fulfilling age- and gender-specific roles to [their] family and community” (cf. Hernandez-Carretero, 2015) appropriate to their life course. Money plays an important role here, being necessary to get on in life and to increase one’s life chances and those of one’s extended family. Not being able to contribute means not being recognized according to the established norms of “gendered authority, status and social mobility” (Guyer, 2004, p. 147).<sup>36</sup>

However, contributions in any direction have become uncertain in light of political inequalities and constraints. Migration is ever more restricted and dangerous, raising its social, political, human, as well as financial price over recent decades. Success and contributing through migration are no longer to be taken for granted. People may have large debts before even leaving for abroad. Deportations throw the former adventurer, his kin and close social contacts into additional and unexpected debt relations, and thus contribute to economic inequalities, scarcities, and an overall “moral crisis.” The *refoulé* is often no longer able to repay his debt, at least financially, and thus to participate in (money) exchange and in what is described as a continuous reconstitution of social relations and the kinship system (cf. Jónsson, 2007, pp. 55ff). He rather increases his dependencies and multiplies debt relations – potentially in financial, social, emotional, and moral terms; even if he has paid in large part for the journey himself as Salif and others reported. Deportees often speak of an individual responsibility for their “failure.” Their social relations are disturbed, tested, and put under constraint. Money cannot take care of shame (cf. Buggenhagen, 2012). Rather, these relations are actively renegotiated, for instance, through gossiping and silence. At the same time, *maloya*, the Mandé concept of shame, implies a positive connotation, as returnees’ sensing and applying to it expresses respect for oneself and others, potentially correcting and preserving good relations and community cohesion.

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36 Jane Guyer speaks of a “political economy of recognition” – money which “ranks people on a scale according to profiles of achievement and good fortune... rather than structural ascription...” (Guyer, 2004, p. 147).

Arjun Appadurai, like others, assigns a particular power to debt: "*Not opposition, but diversion*" as Roitman (2003, p. 214; emphasis in the original) summarizes the appropriate paths and modalities of exchange (cf. Appadurai, 1986, p. 26), debt represents a moment when particular truths about social relations are revealed. Not only in the African context, can debt be seen as very basis of human and social relations (cf. Roitman, 2003, p. 212). According to David Graeber (2005), all human interactions somehow imply some form of reciprocity. Debt "then, is just an exchange that has not been brought to completion," and the relations, which are deeply moral, remain uneven: it is what happens "in between" (pp. 121f). Debt relations can thus be seen as indicators of existential human relations, where potential ambiguity and ambivalence come particularly into play, "the society is our debt" (p. 136). On the one hand, economies and networks of trust provide the basis for the possibility of debt for an adventurer's endeavor in the first place. When money is lost or not obtained, reciprocity does not balance out. Hierarchies may remain, or shift depending on whether one has money or not. Likewise, the inherent ambivalence of social relations, particularly with family, entails a large spectrum of fraud, jealousy, and envy, the "negative reciprocity," this demanding, narrow, and tiresome aspect of the family (Geschiere, 2013, p. 71, building on Marshall Sahlins, 1965).<sup>37</sup> The everyday web of social interdependencies and reciprocal relations is particularly challenged. Powerful family networks can, as a matter of course, handle such situations with more facility than looser networks, as can better-off families. Uncertain monetized and commoditized personal relations and networks make those involved in the commodity of the migratory adventure particularly constrained. Former adventurers' brothers may become oppressive and demanding when their money has been lost or has not been obtained as expected; and mothers too may be put under serious constraint.

Janet Roitman (2003) speaks of a "productive power of debt" as a mode of either affirming or denying sociability. She refers to Sarthou-Lajus with "debt breaks with the logic of exchange [...] because it induces deferred exchange, or intervals of time, that reorganize such relations through the multiplication of possibilities" (1997, p. 18; after Roitman, 2003, pp. 213f).<sup>38</sup> Such creative and productive conceptualizations of debt in the context of human relations may eventually give space to the re-creation of social relations, networks and intimacies, and "a multiplication of possibilities" indeed. In the sense of Shipton's "serial entrustments" (2006),

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37 Peter Geschiere aims to analyze the negative sides of trustful relations created by the social obligation of gift-giving, "observing jealousy and aggression within the intimate circle of the family" (cf. 2013, p. 71).

38 This approach implies that debt is productive of something and that the productivity of debt is not necessarily revealed in those moments where disorder confronts order (Sarthou-Lajus, 1997, p. 18).

an expected favor could “be passed on to someone else and ... keep moving” (p. 17). One’s loss of money could be transferred, endlessly passed on, and eventually never repaid.<sup>39</sup> Debt in this sense has the potential to strengthen and reinforce social bonds.

Against this background, nurturing one’s contacts and networks is centrally important in every social and migratory respect. Adama was not the only one who relativized this seeming obsession: “In fact, it’s not about money only. You have to have good contacts in order to get anywhere.” Some parents’ wish for their son or daughter to remain after a forced return was linked to their wealth as a person and his/her potential to take care of them on the spot: “If you leave your suffering parents behind without any assistance that’s worse than returning with empty hands,” Broulaye summarized. He would not leave again even if someone offered him a lot of money. My findings seem to mirror what Molly Roth concluded about Mali: money “represents a far less substantial and durable form in which to store wealth than social relationships” (Roth, 2005, pp. 129ff). Still, both are intrinsically interconnected, with wealth being the ultimate aim. The above quote from a deportee from Libya hints at a change in social values, particularly visible between generations, in which the monetization and commoditization of social relations, against a background of economic corrosion, are of central importance: when the older generation may no longer be able to support the younger as it used to (including helping them depart on an adventure), and when the practices and expectations of contributing are changing. It is like an adjusted reciprocity, in which the debt diminishes, is transferred, or opens up new possibilities. So, building on the notion of a “productive power of debt,” on Roitman, Sarthou-Lajus, and Shipiton, such social and familial debts are to be seen as intrinsic parts of relations, of reproducing, renegotiating, and potentially guaranteeing social cohesion.

## Concluding remarks

This chapter set out to analyze the social meaning of money after deportation. This has meant empirically developing and contextualizing deportees’ departing in search of money with wealth as their ultimate aim but unexpectedly returning with empty hands, within the different forms of (re)creating (exchange) relations and reproduction. After deportation, social relations and positions may be under

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39 Parker Shipton’s concept of entrustment refers to practices of borrowing which permeate social relations between family and community members. Local credits and debts are highly symbolic and potentially cut deep as obligations shaping identities and cultural existences. Such entrustments may include “delayed marriage payments, or school fee payments from elder to younger kin, reciprocated many years later or in indirect ways” (Shipton, 2006, p. 17).

constraint and require substantial readjustment in a society where the relatedness of a person and the social dimension matter particularly. (Missing) economic contributions cannot be thought of outside their relationality and social context. More than that, the entire family may be indebted and suffer from the loss on the adventure in the long run.

The powerful emotion of shame, *maloya* in Mandé terms, plays a central role both by being anticipated and feared, but likewise in preserving as well as potentially recasting social bonds. *Maloya* is thus an ambivalent, but powerful moral, emotional and social signpost. Even if there are many more *refoulés* today than before, stories and gossip about mothers and brothers still play a prominent role, while gaining and losing money remains at the center of observation and accusation. One central thesis has been the difference it makes to obtain money during one's travels and remit it back, even if one is deported in the end. Such "guarantees," as they might be called, build economic and social security and better embed an involuntary returnee economically and socially. He has been able to prepare at least to some degree – a condition that has been widely discussed in academic literature as necessary above all else for a beneficial return and reintegration. Silence and gossip are powerful political tools for reviewing the social and moral order shattered by the political realities of forced returns and may simultaneously constitute potential agentic ways out, not least through retaining some respect and a good name (*tôgò nyuman*).

In the end, it seems *not* to be all about making money in order to obtain wealth. Wealth lies in a person counting up the degree of his or her social embeddedness and value for the common good. These can be recovered and restored even if the person in question is morally condemned at first. Often, the returned son tries to reintegrate into the household as a last refuge, while adapting to the family economy on site. Many respondents describe themselves as being obliged to stay where they are ("*on est obligé*"; "*on n'a pas de choix*"), although the past adventure and a potential new one may continue to form part of their everyday life. The real loss and the memory of the loss may, nevertheless, be constantly present, as Salif's and Karim's cases demonstrate. They centrally impair one's financial capacity and responsibility toward the family. In this sense deportations have to be integrated into the circularity of family livelihood, social adulthood, and reciprocity. Young men post deportation try to recover their dignity by going on to become good people. The next chapter will expound how this is done through recovering and renegotiating one's masculinities.



