Chapter 7
"*Si j'ai la chance.*"[1] – Final sense- and future-making of "failed" adventures post deportation

Deportees' narratives time and again made reference to a higher spiritual force: to God, more generally to luck, with "*la chance*" (in Bambara: *kunna dija* or *gèrè diège*) featuring very prominently. A whole range of different aspects are in play here, from the role of God and one's supposed destiny to opportunities and "real" chances, all of which interlink, and, not least, to what a person can make out of this by keeping on going – something many deportees showed in their everyday lives, as described in the previous chapter. "Empty hands," for instance, can be explained as God's will. But, faced with the uncertainty caused by the rupture of deportation, *la chance* appears to serve as the ultimate cause in terms of sense- and future-making. So, in this closing analytical chapter, I want to look further into this notion of *la chance*, which links to people's spirituality and cosmology, and, most importantly, to examine how all this relates to their approach to the world and their own future (cf. also Ludwig, 2017a). Here, we come back to, and develop further, the elements of (im)mobility, longing, talking, and sharing about a migratory journey, as well as actually being an adventurer. My aim is to thereby underline the main thesis of this book, namely that, in the end, it is not about (missed) "success" only, or the sheer "failure" of the migratory adventure or returning without what one went out to search for, even if these normative conceptions are fundamentally shattered through deportation experiences, loss of money, and ambivalent social effects in particular, all of which continue to have an impact in specific ways after deportation. These are very complex categories in regard to their social and cultural embedding and, though they may be shattering in the first instance, they can be productive at the same time.

Going on after a deportation is not only a means to recover one's masculinities, in fact, it is central to one's spiritual and moral being and for living one's life as a "good person with body, soul, and heart." In line with Youngsted (2013), these

1 "*If I am lucky*," in Bambara: *ne kunna dijara*.

young men are "surviving in dignity," without fatalism, and, importantly, also in spiritual terms. I will show that trying and searching appears to be a prerequisite for eventually perceiving and obtaining a new chance. All these features again link intrinsically to the characteristics and ascriptions of being an adventurer and "a man." Here, the adventure and memories of it become endowed with spiritual qualities, with the adventure itself potentially becoming a spiritual journey.

In this, the final analytical chapter of the study, I will carefully trace these terms, narratives and practices and contextualize them in the post-deportation setting. First, I will dive into the concept of *la chance* and references to a higher spirituality as used for sense- and future-making empirically as well as theoretically. I will then demonstrate the concept's entanglements with and developments in (post-)adventures, showing specific evolutions and meanings of planning and imagining the future, such as the practice of "*maraboutage*." Finally, I will revisit the idea of the collective imaginary of migratory success in light of increasing numbers of deportations and deaths, and as collective sense- and future-making. Overall, this is another facet of the ambivalence of the supposed "failed" adventure, how deportees experience, narrate, and deal with the effects of their deportations afterwards and in the longer run, thus making sense – as well as their futures – in rural and urban southern Mali.

Approaches to *la chance* – Adama and the past chance of the adventure

The case of Adama, the "philosopher" in Bamako, as I called him (see Chapter 5), provides an example of the narrative presentation and practice of *la chance* in and after a supposedly "failed" adventure. Almost philosophically, the former deportee, then sewing shoes beside a main street, described his attempt to go to Europe, his deportations and his struggles with borders and authorities. After many hypermobile years in the subregion, Adama had got as far as Mauritania, Morocco, and eventually Libya, where he was deported and then deported again, most recently in the year 2000. In his mid-forties in 2014, he remembered and described his tireless and suffering adventurous years in search of money as follows:

> Coming to the border, they leave you in the desert. If you want [to go anywhere], you have to walk. You can do as you want. In any case that's how it works. It was not easy. That's the misery, but at that moment it did not cause too much hardship to us, because we wanted to go to Europe. When you have something in your head, you try to push yourself and to forget the suffering. … You see, after all, this is suffering. But it's also good to suffer. A man that has not known suffering can never know how the others have succeeded. Somebody who has suffered a lot, that's also an apprenticeship. Suffering is an apprenticeship. We, who have done

> such type of journeys, and those, who have not done them, we don't have the same ideas. We have different ideas. That's why there are some who do not understand life. I, I have had *la chance* a little bit. (Adama, 11-15-2014)

His account goes beyond the aspects of hardship and suffering developed before to "having something in your head," endurance and conviction, dedication and going on. Moreover, it goes beyond the meaning of suffering and searching to the adventure as a learning experience and, importantly, as the process of becoming "a man." The political scenario here is a stage for acting on rather than something considered to be structurally responsible for one's individual situation. After all, Adama thinks himself lucky to have lived through these experiences. He had *la chance*, as he calls it, even if only a little bit of it. It was the specific suffering he underwent that was his piece of luck, although he did not succeed in economic terms and never reached Europe.

La chance in actual fact implies much more than luck. His narrative made his journey into something dignified and sublime, even a spiritual experience. He took the opportunity that was offered to him. As he explained: "*La chance* is not only money, you know. *La chance* is also getting to know the life of others, getting to know the culture of others. That's also important. This is important" (Adama, 11-15-2014). He provided a differentiated picture of what *la chance* might be, here creating an opening to the world and a learning experience through others' lives. He is a full-fledged adventurer in his experiences, memories, and narrative representations. His open-mindedness is characteristic of many other former deportees and migrants I met. It can be considered part of their "adventure-hood" as expounded in the previous chapter. As an all-encompassing experience, the adventure gave Adama a satisfaction and a source of dignity that had endured up to the time when we met. His deportations and rejections were just one aspect in the diverse cycles and phases of (im)mobile life. Thanks to his constant activity, he had been able to perceive and obtain *la chance* in his own eyes. More than that, in this way he had grown morally and spiritually through his adventure. Now, however, many years later, the hazards presently accompanying the adventure made it not worthwhile trying again.

> No, I decided to stay here. […] Because I told myself, trying to go on a clandestine migration, I don't want that anymore…This is also not the normal way. If you go clandestinely, you are not in accordance with the rules, and they deport you directly. (Adama, 11-15-2014)

This sounds like a replication of the official discourse of safe migration, as described above, which seemed to have become more established since Adama's day (see Chapter 6). Adama had, he felt, collected sufficient experience and knowledge as an adventurer, and reached a certain age – though age was not an explicit part

of his argument. Most importantly, as he again concluded: "Like this, I have succeeded a little bit." Adama considered himself to have been the one who took the decisions – whether to walk on in the desert, and now whether to stay and not leave again, as this had been an essential prerequisite for a sustainable return and reintegration, as outlined in Chapter 5. He did not see himself as subjected to external forces and immobilized. He had had *la chance* "a little bit." This can be seen as a declaration of autonomy and agency against structural constraints and interventions, narratively manifested as *la chance*, which he defines as the luck and the little bit of success he had had. Within his space of possibilities, Adama was leading a self-determined life in Bamako. He maintained his ex-wife and his three children on his small income, and planned to take the children to his mother's village for further education, as Malian tradition prescribes, he explained. Nevertheless, he himself did not return to the village, preferring the social distance and anonymity of the city.

On chances, luck, and destiny

In deportees' narratives, and in everyday life more generally, *la chance* is used to explain past experiences, present situations as well as the future one may potentially encounter, here in situations after deportation. *La chance*, in Bambara *kunna dija*, can mean luck, success, and opportunities as described by Adama, as well as serendipity and the unexpected. In local terms having *kunna* means having the possibility of success if one commits oneself to it, tries to attain it. More generally, *la chance* is inherent in all essential life stages – education, traveling, farming, marriage, and aging, all of which are deeply engrained in one's social relations: "everything that you do in your life is a question of *la chance*." After deportation it appears to be a specific anchor and signpost as to how to make sense of things and go about doing them.

On the one hand, loss and "failure" as a result of deportation can be described as depending on God and a higher spirituality. Salif illustrated this: "If you win it's good, but if you lose, it depends on God. … I did not reach Europe and the economy that was behind me is lost, thus everything depends on God for me." More explicitly, a common saying is "*On s'en remet à dieu*" (One leaves something up to God) or as if stating the ultimate reason for something: "everything is an act of God." God's will may be used interchangeably with *la chance* or the two may be explicitly linked: "God gave me *la chance* to return in good health." Similarly, people say: "everything is a question of *la chance*." Also "the adventure is a matter of *la chance*" including its upsides and downsides. Not only does such argumentation offer a reason for what happened, and how things are, but *la chance* has a specific orientation towards the future, providing a repertoire for how to go along. These narrative usages of *la*

chance fit perfectly into the relational ambivalence of the adventure as previously described. It cannot be seen without its broader spiritual and cosmological embedding, closely interlinked with the social order so that *la chance* becomes a very complex phenomenon in narrative presentations of sense-making and practices of how to go about one's life after deportation.

Brahima, "the Spaniard" from the Bamako market, for instance, made sense of his "failed" journey when he summed up: "But if God decides something, one cannot do anything against it." Likewise Ousmane's uncle Ibrahim in the little village framed his own empty hands after being deported from Libya in 2001: "It's God who decides, so you cannot complain." More explicitly than Adama's, these remarks demonstrate a widespread belief in some kind of fate or destiny. They seem to devoutly accept the outcome, but they still stay active in many areas of life, most importantly in fulfilling their socially expected role in light of the danger of being called a coward or lazy (*fa den sago*). More than that, and as also exemplified by Adama and Brahima, they were engaged in a constant search for a higher, spiritual being and personhood through submitting to God.

With respect to elder brothers' accusations against younger brothers on account of the latter's monetary loss and deportation, Broulaye explained as above, "But that's not exactly it. Everybody has his destiny." In this situation, many deportees would feel obliged to leave again in order "to find the money to refund […] the elder brother," but, he continued, outlining the ambivalence of the situation, "on the contrary, others say to 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." Belief in a predestined outcome enables the young men's inability to enter Europe to be seen as something that they were not fully responsible for and could not influence. It is of the utmost importance that one remains healthy, able to work and to earn money to contribute. The wealth of the person eventually counts most. It is against this background that a "failure" is often characterized by deportees and their family and friends as "the adventure did not work out" (*tounga man ja*), as described in Chapter 5, or "he did not succeed," or more precisely as, "I did not have *la chance*."

La chance and the references to God and luck on the one hand seem to demonstrate a tendency to explain the world by generalizing and more importantly externalizing responsibility onto God, a higher spirituality, and one's destiny, which eventually relates to one's social relationship with one's parents and the role of the mother in particular. At the same time, all this is brought into connection with one's activities and the need and wish to decide and go on, to make something out of it: "That they can still work to earn," as Broulaye put it. In this vein, and as the cases of Brahima, Salif, and others show, a sense of obligation to stay after a deportation can be seen as submission to God and a cosmological belief in *la chance*: this widespread belief makes one "not challenge destiny too much," it is often said. In

the following, I will delve further into this tension between human agency, destiny, and fate.

The adventurer's "failures," risks, and chances

Equating *la chance* with luck (like equating it to God) is appropriate, but does not suffice to explain the entire phenomenon. Furthermore, beyond a western or neoliberal discussion about luck in terms of fortune and wealth, the current use of *la chance* needs to be seen in its specifically migratory as well as local context. Recent discussions in studies on African migration (to Europe) and luck are helpful and make further attempts at theorizing. As in the Malian context, luck is described here as intertwining the notions of free individual agency with ideas of fate and a predetermined course (cf., e.g., Gladkova & Mazzucato, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015b; Nieswand, 2010).[2]

In people's accounts, references to *la chance* have a great deal to do with trying and seeing whether there are opportunities, generally conditioned by uncertainty and crisis. After deportation, a distinct adaptability and flexibility are necessary. Such an attitude furthermore links up with a locally grown flexibility, what Müller (1990) calls "flexibility out of tradition." This is developed from an analysis of economic activity in agriculture, ethnic classification and religiously founded ordering patterns in the central Niger Delta throughout Malian history that are characterized by multiple alternatives and practices, which are realized according to need and possibility and related to adaptations to the extreme climatic conditions of the dry and rainy seasons (Müller, 1990, pp. 139ff). This flexibility is also related to conditions of everyday suffering and hardship and describes a particular cultural repertoire of endurance, adaptability, and a perceptivity for "serendipity" (Gaibazzi, 2015b, p. 228) that enables people to cope with the risk and uncertainty present in the everyday of their precarious life worlds. Not least, this is a supposed essential characteristic of the adventurer as described here in particular.

Susann Ludwig (2017a) conducted a convincing longitudinal study of Malian graduates in which she identified the emic concept of *la chance* as central to people's sense-making as well as their future-making in an environment of uncertainty, which is based on common-sense knowledge. She subdivides the meaning of *la*

2 Gladkova and Mazzucato (2017) focus narrowly on "chance encounters," referring to a "migrant's transitory social interactions" with a previously unknown people (p. 4). They identify two different (even if rather simplistic) character types among African migrants whose attitudes translate into how they encounter chances: as opportunities for positive change or as risky endeavors. Chance here empirically relates to God, fate and destiny and appears as something unexpected and hazardously occurring. Even if the authors do not further develop this direction, chance is a moment inspiring change and thus similar to Ludwig's (2017a) conceptualization, a moment separating the present from the past, as will be developed shortly.

chance as follows: "University graduates in Mali create «*la chance*» (opportunities); they take «*la chance*» (chances), but they also simply have «*la chance*» (luck) or happen to find «*la chance*» (serendipity)" (Birzle & Ludwig, 2015; cf. Ludwig, 2017a, p. 33). Her definitions pre-empt and underline deportees' narrative references to *la chance* in a different context, which emphasizes the meaning of the local context. She argues that Malian graduates "open up *la chance*." In terms of its temporal meaning (which I will shortly specify),

> *La chance* separates the present from the future since it enables a different present – something has been imagined as the future in the past. … *[L]a chance* is ambiguous: it can be accessed and influenced by individual action; but it is also believed to be God's will, which cannot be influenced (Ludwig, 2017b, p. 70).

In Mandé, generally speaking, people believe that every single person has a proper destiny which can be challenged and which has to be invoked through personal activity, but which it is not fundamentally possible to influence (cf. Brand, 2001). This kind of broader embedding and a general belief in destiny, fate, and one's chances, not only serve, as shown, as a last resort for sense-making post deportation, but more generally underlie the way people live their lives and not least make their futures in West Africa. So, as an overall cosmology, it tends to be commonly distributed among young people in Mali.

When we take the cases of deportees presented in the earlier chapters, and the more general narrative and practical relation to *la chance* described so far, this bringing together of the past, the present, and the future appears not to be a question of social standing, education, a particular migratory experience, or having potentially more "real" chances and opportunities than others.[3] The young men in my research used and adapted the concept of *la chance* to their context in a similar way to the young Malian graduates that Ludwig describes.[4] However, *la chance* receives a specific connotation and role under conditions after deportation, not least as it links in perfectly with the approach of the supposed "failed" adventurer.

The accounts of former deportees show that a specific attitude to approaching and opening up *la chance*, "engaging for it" in local terms, is central. Adama understood his suffering and interrupted journeys as his destiny, which he needed to submit to, but which he had shaped as well. He even appreciated the luck he had had and went to work on it actively and constructively. Brahima did not sit and twiddle his thumbs, nor did Seku, Salif and the many others introduced before, even if they were demoralized and in a potentially restless state. "A hustler does

3 Even if the issue of "real" chances does self-evidently play a role in everyday life (cf. Schulz & Diallo, 2016; cf. Chapter 6).

4 I would not even call this a specifically Malian or Mandé (cf. Gaibazzi, 2015b) phenomenon; for instance, Cameroonian transit migrants I met in Mali similarly referred to *la chance*.

not sit idly by" (Gaibazzi, 2015a), and "as a man you have to be strong where you are!" are the hegemonic lines to follow as we learned in the last chapter. "Good adventurers" need to be open and adaptable to the unpredictability of *la chance*. As when searching for money, for something else, to become someone, one is looking for luck and the right opportunity to come along.[5] As developed in the last chapter, this goes along with an ethos of hard work and suffering, self-discipline, as well as endurance, which is implanted, above all in rural men, from early on. Not only does this make "a full man" in terms of the ruling idea of masculinity, it prepares one to manage one's own life as well as the lives of those close to one.

It is against this background that former or future adventurers, young and old, may likewise appear vigilant and self-determined when representing themselves as experts in travel (see Chapter 6). Furthermore, people's approach to and perception of *la chance* and their broader cosmology help us to understand adventurers' high level of risk-taking, narratively expressed in such sayings as: "If you go on adventures you have to be aware that you may die or not. But you are going to die in any case." While risk is implied in the concept of the adventure and consciously accepted (Dougnon, 2013), a narrative and practical account of *la chance* is an expression, in part, of the politically and structurally shaped conditions that restrict people's life worlds, as well as an answer to them. This comes over in declarations such as Madou's "at that moment, the idea of a journey had taken over my mind. Either I went on an adventure or I would die, because there is so much poverty in Mali" (see Chapter 4). Madou, who urgently felt the need to re-emigrate after his deportation from Mauritania, demonstrated people's desperation, but at the same time their conviction that possibilities do exist. In situations of deep uncertainty and disillusion, that notion may provide security and a halt.

Risk and uncertainty have been more generally and increasingly discussed in studies on youth in Africa today (e.g., Pratten & Cooper, 2015; Whitehouse, 2012; Weiss, 2004), on modernity (e.g., Beckert, 2016, see below), and in particular on migration (Alpes, 2017; Collyer et al., 2015). Alpes (2012) and others all concluded that death, hardship, and deportations do not frighten people. Beyond the contribution of risk-taking, courage, and endurance to the make-up of a full-fledged adventurer and "man," their belief in their own chances allows us to understand even better the attitudes of so-called "kamikaze" migrants (Hernández-Carretero & Carling, 2012) or "bushfallers" (Alpes, 2017), who readily accept high risks in venturing out. Even if it may appear like fatalism, it is better seen as a feature of the previously described

5 People need to be open "to unexpected turns in their careers, to keep moving and to work as a way of remaining alert to the unforeseen occurrences of fortune," Gaibazzi depicts the Gambian hustlers likewise. This "quest for luck" is most intrinsically connected to (im)mobility cultures; it embodies a "kinetic notion as well as existential understanding of destiny" (2015b, p. 227).

spirit of not giving up, becoming a good person and a socially recognized, honorable man through experiencing, searching, earning, and contributing (cf. also Maher for the case of Senegalese *refoulés*, 2015, p. 49). Gaibazzi names this mode of existence "journeying" (2015b), while Monica Belloni (2015) speaks of "gambling" to describe the trial- and-error attitude of Eritrean refugees on their often deadly passages to Italy. Lucht (2017) moreover coined the phrase "eternal existential unrest" to describe the attitude of migrants stuck in Niger, who did not lose faith, but kept on going in the conviction that their efforts would pay off one day – if not before, then in their afterlife (see also Chapter 4). For Adama, his adventure was an existential struggle, which appeared to be sublimated into a sort of spiritual journey toward honor, dignity, and respect that was paying off in his everyday life now.

Religious and ritualistic inscriptions of "failed" adventures

La chance is in the end to be seen within a broader religious, spiritual, and cosmological order. Many deportees grow up with Islam and a widespread spirituality. Taking care of one's family through the adventure is, for instance, part of the commitment of being a good Muslim (cf. Maher, 2015, p. 35) More than that, there is a long-standing practice of coping with contingency and indeterminacy in Africa, including the use of various forms of divination and witchcraft that "probe causal forces inherently thought to lie beyond human control" (Bromber et al., 2015, p. 9). Cosmology and witchcraft have been discussed in particular as integral parts of the neoliberal dispensation in Africa (cf. Gaibazzi, 2015b; Geschiere, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2011, 2001, 1999; Weiss, 2004). For Henrietta Nyamnjoh (2010) religion fills a gap in the lives of those who do not benefit from the promises of modernity and globalization, and possibly even gives solace in experiences of migrant death, suffering and loss (cf. p. 82).

Luck or chance and success are part of Islamic destiny, as well as part of migratory trajectories, like suffering and "failure." Belief systems that explain humans' "failure" or success as a result of their being torn between human agency and a predetermined destiny are to be found in the cosmological notions in West Africa too.[6] Igor Kopytoff speaks of "pragmatic religion"; for Meyer Fortes these things are "modes of living" and for Evans-Pritchard "part and parcel of social process" (cf. Karp, 1986, pp. 715f). In this vein, analyzing religious or spiritual practices can allow in-depth insights into social relations and their context.

Boris Nieswand further explains that these notions (including a "negative" as well as a "positive destiny"), rather than serving as a thorough explanation of the

6 Jackson (2017) says that even in the most fatalist conceptions of destiny in West Africa there is a vestige of human agency to be found (cf. Gaibazzi, 2015b, p. 233).

world, form an explanatory foil to specific actions and occurrences (Nieswand, 2010). Against this background, Nieswand develops the concept "enacted destiny" from his work with charismatic Protestant (African) migrant groups/churches in Berlin. It places a positive outcome and success between human agency and predetermined, divine destiny. Several works on charismatic Protestant movements place the emphasis on free will and the role of human activity and influence as a tribute to modernity (e.g., Van Dijk, 2007; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001). Similarly, a certain entrepreneurial attitude on the part of Malian adventurers (cf. Chapter 6) and the idea of the adventure as a commodity could be placed within a neoliberal ideology. More than that, however, they are deeply embedded in and part of local narratives and notions. And in this respect the social relation and embedding are of the utmost importance and deeply interlinked with the broader cosmology.

Meyer Fortes, one of the first anthropologists to analyze West African belief systems, concluded that one's social role is intrinsically related to one's destiny. In his famous monograph "Oedipus and Job in West African Religion" ([1956] 2018), he describes how, for the Tallensi: "not fear, ignorance, or superstition, but the moral bonds of the filio-parental relationship are the springs of Tale ancestor-worship" (ibid., p. 409). Similar to the concept of a "debt of life" (Bredeloup, 2017), he explains, "It is because one owes one's life to one's parents, Tallensi say, that one has irrevocable and absolute bonds with them" (Fortes, [1956] 2018, p. 409). According to Fortes' interpretation, this parallels very much Job's recognition of the unquestioned authority of God and his submission to it. "One's destiny should not be challenged too much," as explained above. If this bond between the parents and the child, here the mother in particular, is "abortive," and the child has an "evil Prenatal Destiny," this serves for the Tallensi "to identify the fact of irremediable failure in the development of the individual to full social capacity." In fact, all this links in well with the belief in the importance of the relationship between mothers and children, and the role of mothers in particular (see Chapter 5).

It is no accident that an expression such as "everything is a question of *la chance*" reminds us of the Bambara saying *bè bi ba bolo*, "everything is in the hands of/ depends on your mother" and "everything you have will be owed to your mother," which eventually puts the mother at the center of responsibility for an adventurer's success or breakdown. One's mother is seen as responsible for one's fate and destiny, here related to the migratory adventure and its potential breakdown, which puts her in danger of being blamed and could potentially imply the son's social death (*fa den sago*). Still, there are considerable differences between the two approaches. While *la chance* is a way of explaining one's situation by referring to God and luck, *bè bi ba bolo* is a statement stressing one's moral accountability as described more fully in Chapter 5, not least related to the submissiveness of the mother to her husband. It relates to Fortes' ethnographic conception insofar as he considers destiny to be deeply relational and social. For the Tallensi, this "is neu-

tralized by ritual procedures based on the belief that evil Prenatal Destiny is in the last resort susceptible of control by the ancestors if they so will it" (Fortes, [1956] 2018, p. 411). Thus the Tallensi consider ways to get around even an "evil Prenatal Destiny." In Mandé such a neutralizing effect could also relate, therefore, to the supposed "good" behavior of the mother; however, there is no means of setting the mother in a spiritual, otherwordly position. This would remain something different. More than that, it would set the mother in relation to *la chance* and thus to an overall sense- and future-making.

A supposedly "failed" migratory adventure does not mean "the end of the world" is a saying repeated not only by representatives of the AME (field notes, 10-20-2014). It follows reasonings such as "the travel did not work in the first or second place, but there are other ways to go about it." Although the quest for fortune may have failed at the first attempt, the quest for luck has not, or may deserve another *chance*. Failure and success are thus "two sides of the same coin" (e.g., Voirol & Schendzielorz, 2014, p. 27) or "provisional containers for one another" (Appadurai, 2016, p. xxv). Interestingly, migrants' accounts in Nieswand's study refer relatively little to failure. The latter is either compensated for by a focus on the future, or accounted for as an instance of individual misconduct, as something evil or as a "ritual mistake." In the sense of enacted destiny, success is described as divine and "failure" as human. Maher discussed deportations in Senegal using the image of a "failed ritual" (Maher, 2015, p. 32f), which, if it fails, needs to be fixed.[7] All of this links back to the ancient concept of the adventure as a "rite of passage" and eventually to the generative and transformative power of ritual (cf. Jackson, 2017, 2005). "Failure" in giving space for creating something new, becomes a productive category itself. *La chance* in relation to going on serves as a basis for some recognition, eventually enabling new chances and potential to "fix" such "failure" through other achievements and, maybe, to repair the ritual and neutralize one's destiny as well. It is in this respect that *la chance* is something "ambiguous" between individual agency and divine dependency, something one has to commit oneself to. Not least, from such point of view, one can better understand the ambivalence of the migratory adventure and an assumed "failure" as an intrinsic mode of being of people torn between mobility cultures, social expectations and migratory constraints, and eventually as a productive category.

Maraboutage and calling on higher spirits for *la chance* in adventures

One of these practices of ritualistic repair can be consulting a "*marabout*" or calling on higher spirits. More generally, consulting *marabouts* is an established practice to learn about one's predetermined destiny in tension with individual agency and

7 A failed ritual can, accordingly, be the result of a mistake in performing the ritual as well as the failure of the ritual as such, in terms of its efficacy (cf. Bonhomme, 2008).

for activating *la chance*, before, during, and after (failed) adventures, and in many other stages of everyday life. *Marabouts* are local spiritual leaders, usually male[8], in West Africa and previously also in the Maghreb, and mostly in the tradition of Sufism. They were highly renowned and influential representatives of the priesthood in previous centuries, and there is a large diversity of *marabouts* in Mali today.[9] A village usually has at least one *marabout*, who may potentially be in conflict with the local imam. A common *marabout* may combine animistic, shamanic, and esoteric elements with those of the Islamic religion in telling the future. Still a difference is made between a *marabout* and a "*féticheur*" (a fetishist, in English, in the sense of a worshipper of fetishes or priest of an animistic religion) who is often referred to as a mere peddler of superstition and sorcery. While at the same time fetishes and talismans play a central part in everyday life.[10] When someone is going on an adventure the *marabout* or *féticheur* hands over a *giri-giri* for a safe journey (cf. also Nymanjoh, 2010). Otherwise, *marabouts* are renowned and honored for their visionary powers and some have become central public figures in Mali today (Schulz, 2006). For many people, consulting one's *marabout* is a prerequisite at any stage of life. Regarding their central meaning in people's cosmology and being, Brand (2001) describes *marabouts*' activities as taking place in the grey area between fate and destiny, where one's actions are seen to be decisive but unclear in outcome (pp. 148ff). In this way, a *marabout* can be of essential help in providing guidance and orientation within this vague space. More likely, the *marabout's* support will make things more acceptable (p. 29). The latter becomes particularly important retrospectively, after a deportation, but also in relation to the future.

Maraboutage is in its function "inextricably linked to the cultures of migration" (Nymanjoh, 2010, p. 4). In fact, *marabouts* have become part of the commodification of the migratory adventure through broadening their activities towards the lucrative business of foretelling an adventure's potential success or "failure." Ida Marie Vammen calls these *marabouts* "brokers of hope" (2017), as, in light of the uncertainty of adventure, many seek advice to learn about their destiny in order to avoid potential "failures" and capture success, fortune, luck, and *la chance*. For example, an adventurer may consult his *marabout* before leaving, but also before entering the boat in Mauritania or in Libya to ensure a safe journey. Beyond that, spiritual and divination practices are widely established means of receiving advice on the

8 AmberGemmeke (2008), however, wrote about female marabouts in Dakar.

9 For some more historic insights and the current *Grand Marabouts* in Mali see Wiedemann (2013). Thiam (2014) defines *marabout* as Muslim religious sage, who can be a Qur'anic master or religious guide.

10 Often children, male as well as female, receive a small leather belly chain which is intended to bring them luck, and many people wear so-called *giri-giris*, necklaces and amulets also believed to bring spiritual blessings and luck.

imponderables of an adventure and ensuring its positive outcome. Often mothers call on the higher spirits and pray for success and blessing for their sons. Salif's mother went to see a *djin*[11] in her home village, to know if his journey would work out successfully. Meanwhile, he consulted a *marabout* and sacrificed an ox. More than that, some *marabouts* have also become part of migration-facilitating networks themselves (Vammen, 2017).

I once participated in a spiritual ritual calling on the wisdom of a caiman, a member of a subspecies of the alligator, which was seen as a spiritual force able to make hopes and desires come true. It was in a little village where we had been staying for several days. Very early in the morning Birama and I accompanied a small group of villagers to express our wishes to the sacred caiman. In an excited and solemn atmosphere, wearing white clothes[12], we followed the eldest son of a family of hunters[13] who had inherited the legacy of calling the caiman, to a small lake about two kilometers into the woods. One after the other people went to the ritual master, telling him their wishes, handing over their sacrifices, mostly cola nuts and living poultry, which the master slaughtered in calling the caiman. A woman in a festive white dress and veil with little colorful flowers around the edges stood out. She shouted out loud and vehemently. Birama translated in a whisper: "I wish my son luck in passing the ocean! He is in Algeria. I want him to succeed in crossing to bring happiness and fortune to the entire family. I wish he may be strong and courageous!" It appeared to be of the utmost importance and seriousness how she framed and openly displayed her wish for her son's success.

Not only did this underline how successes and "failures" in adventures are incorporated in spiritual practices, but the woman's performance also emphasized the necessity of publicly demonstrating her support and dedication to the realization of that success. It appeared as if this would enable her to deeply hope for and rely on the survival of her son, not to mention his support – maybe also well aware of all the constraints he might face in order to achieve these aims. More than that, it might be a necessary demonstration to underline her backing and benediction as a mother, which are believed to be decisive for a son's success, and finally also to prevent defamatory speech by the villagers – even if the latter can only be a presumption. In this respect, it could be interpreted as a demonstration of how the linkage of destiny and fate depends on the child–parent relationship and its ritualistic invocation as described by Meyer Fortes. The caiman appeared after some

11 Here a woman, who is said to have great visionary capacities.

12 White is considered the color of initiation and in Africa usually worn for initiation rituals htt p://dictionnairedessymboles.com/2016/03/le-symbolisme-du-blanc.html, accessed 31 October 2021.

13 Mandé hunters are considered to be great sorcerers and part of the bush ("*la brousse*"), the domain of sorcery, where they perform their hunting activities (Jansen, 1996, p. 680).

time. It was barely visible though. Some waves indicated its appearance. Still excited, but satisfied, we left the place and returned to the village.

There were other occasions, in cases of deportation, where the *marabout* had obviously made a wrong prediction before the adventurer left, or a spiritual medium, such as the caiman or a *djin*, failed to make the wish expressed – and not least paid for – come true. "That's how I lost 200,000 F CFA just as a matter of course[14] – just for a forecast, without even any transport!" – Salif was angry about his mother's intervention with the *djin* and the *marabout* at the same time. Blaming the spiritual mediator could also serve as a way of externalizing his anger. Others would consult a *marabout* again, although the previous journey had not worked out: "it's not good to do things haphazardly," which means, proper guidance is needed. Yakouba killed and sacrificed four sheep, before leaving, at the *marabout's* request. The intervention of a *marabout* or other spiritual mediator is seen as a kind of insurance for the risky journey and for its continuation afterwards, providing certainty at the moment of doing something, which matters even more than the retrospective evaluation of the prediction. Consulting the *marabout* after a forced return helps make sense of the unexpected thing that happened, moreover one receives guidance for one's next steps. Such an approach also indicates some acceptance of the "failed" attempt and the wrong prediction as well; most importantly, it is about a new certainty at this moment disclosing another way to go about things. In contrast to that, Karim refused, being clearly resigned: "When I was deported, I was very sad (literally: "my heart was suffering"; see Chapter 5). I did not go to a *marabout* again" (Karim, 11-1-2015). Others would openly deny ever consulting a *marabout*, even less a *féticheur* or other spiritual guide.

Although *maraboutage* plays such a central role in people's lifeworlds on the basis of the prominence and long standing of practices of divination and witchcraft, I encountered a certain social secretiveness and embarrassment when people openly acknowledged that a wrong prediction had been made by a *marabout*. In a discussion with a group of deportees in Seku's village one afternoon, nobody answered my question about who went to the *marabout* before leaving. Then, there was some ashamed laughter. One of them confessed that he went, and everybody laughed, first a hidden chuckling, then a resounding roar. Overall, there was an abashed atmosphere. The majority of young men sitting there in the animated circle seemed to agree with the general practice of *maraboutage* with respect to the adventure. "If you fail, you go to the *marabout* for a second try and turn of adventure, and if you fail again, you may choose to go to another *marabout* to ensure you get good advice in case you want to leave again and have a third try," one said and everybody nodded, though some started laughing again.

14 About 300 €.

The practice of consulting the *marabout* to learn about the future outcome of the adventure was not questioned – in the event of a failed prediction you tried another *marabout*. While this links in with the general attitude of trying and seeing and not giving up, they seemed to be afraid of losing face in front of one another, as well as vis-à-vis me and Birama. At the same time, testing another *marabout* subverts the belief in one's destiny, or to put it a better way, the role and capacity of *maraboutage* is challenged. Almost all the young men sitting there had "not made it" so far. Apparently, the misleading consultation and a certain secrecy surrounding the fortune-teller, connected to the "failed" attempt, created embarrassment when socially shared in the group. It could be that it might reveal that somebody had a negative destiny, and consequently that his mother had been guilty of wrongdoing that had so far not been able to be compensated for or "neutralized" in any way. The mystical ability of the *marabout* becomes an integral part of what is believed to be destiny or a mother's "failure." While *maraboutage* is an everyday practice, particularly in relation to the migratory adventure, these vague arguments underline a specific uncertainty and disorientation of the everyday at the same time. Deportations contribute to that as well. Still, continuing these spiritual practices provides a source of certainty against the uncertain present and, above all, the uncertain future ahead.

Approaching the future – (un)certainties and contingency under post-deportation conditions

Deportations have been prominently introduced in this study as ruptures affecting the past, the present, and the future – ruptures with long-lasting effects, challenging material, social and emotional relations deeply, and potentially ruinous to family harmony (cf. Jackson, 2017, p. 151). In the event of a temporal discontinuum, through deportation a significant future is put at risk, and becomes potentially impossible to achieve. The *marabout* or *djin* may have predicted wrongly, and the desires linked to the adventure have not been fulfilled.

A deportation may also represent a turning point. As research has shown, uncertainty can become a precondition for hope, aspirations, and not least for productivity, as long as there is an "awareness of it and willingness to act in it" (Kleist & Jansen, 2016, p. 379; cf. Cooper & Pratten, 2015; Johnson-Hanks, 2005).[15] In a similar vein, increasingly literature on African youth links to imaginations, aspirations, desires, future-making, and the role of the future itself (cf., e.g., Carling

15 In this sense, Kleist and Jansen define "hope as a phenomenon [that] is characterized by simultaneous potentiality (in its broadest sense) and uncertainty of the future" (Kleist & Jansen, 2016, p. 379).

& Schwewel, 2017; Vigh, 2009b)[16], in connection with migration in particular (e.g., Stock, 2019; Kleist & Thorsen, 2017). More than that, imagining and aspiring are seen as the first steps to, and prerequisites for, any action and potential change: the concept of "vital conjunctures"[17] put forward by Johnson-Hanks (2002) proves to be particularly relevant for the context discussed here. "Vital conjunctures" point towards the uncertainties of the future, which makes the term particularly useful, when the crisis of deportations adds to everyday uncertainties. Johnson-Hanks defines them as follows: "These are the moments when seemingly established futures are called into question and when actors are called on to manage durations of radical uncertainty. Conjunctures are navigated in reference to their horizons – the imaginable futures that are hoped for or feared" (p. 878). Former deportees are thrown into an unexpected situation and need to find a new way and narrative to make sense of their everyday experience as well as their future. So far, I have shown how this is done through references to and reinterpretations of suffering, hard work, courage, caring, contributing, and leaving again, furthermore through a narrative relation to *la chance*. Eventually, such ruptures and turning points can give space to "another potential future"[18], too.

In southern Mali these imaginable futures have for many been postulated as those of successful departure and return as reference points for people's actions. The "horizons of the conjuncture," as Johnson-Hanks (2002) terms them, remind us of the "horizons of expectations" after Koselleck (2004). Both concepts refer to the horizons of what is imaginable, can be expected and thus can eventually be done at a specific point in time and space, given one's experiences, knowledge, and situation.[19] Here, the imaginable futures, which are the collective imaginary

16 Although obviously running the risk of inaccurately lumping the unlike together with the same, I want to consider the similarities of these concepts as they all constitute ways to deal with uncertainties and contingency in light of constrained mobilities, deportations, and migrants' deaths.

17 The term derives from Johnson-Hanks' work with young, educated Cameroonian women about their future plans, specifically as regards having children. Many of them said they could not make any plans due to their uncertain environment (cf. Engeler & Steuer, 2017). Johnson-Hanks calls "judicious opportunism" (2005, p. 370) the quality that allowed women to respond to an extremely volatile situation.

18 According to Johnson-Hanks, these are "experiential knots during which potential futures are under debate and up for grabs" (p. 872).

19 "Koselleck applied two formal abstract categories – experience and expectation – that interrelate past, present and future, and frame human action with respect to time." (Bromber et al., 2015, p. 4) According to Koselleck, "experience is present past, whose events can be incorporated and remembered through a process of permanent reworking of individual and 'alien' experience." The past as a whole, as diverse interpenetrating and overlapping layers of time, is a "space of experience" (*Erfahrungsraum*). "Expectation" as Koselleck puts it, both individual as well as interpersonal, is "future made present." Expectation is directed at the non-ex-

of migratory success, constitute the hegemonic foil now set in contention through deportation and thus potentially in need of being reinvented.

Susann Ludwig, who worked on Malian university graduates, calls an unexpected, yet desired, rupture of the everyday the "sprout"[20] of *la chance* – in a context where *la chance* divides past, present, and the future. Deportations do indeed usually come unexpectedly and rupture a migrant's life in a country of destination or transit. However, even if rather exceptional, there is a relative probability of the administrative implementation of a deportation: it is more likely in specific political situations such as where there are restrictive migratory policies against "illegal aliens" or a rigorous implementation of EU externalized border controls, in other words elements of the established practice of the global deportation regime. Even so, they are experienced often as happening unexpectedly, when people are caught in the street and returned carrying the symbolic plastic bag, for instance.

Likewise, deportations are in the vast majority of cases said to be undesired, even if deportees and their close friends and relatives may interpret them as not having had *la chance* or having suffered ill luck ("*mauvaise chance*").[21] At the same time, the rupture through deportations may open up a space for "another potential future" and eventually a new chance. Ludwig's findings reveal how *la chance* provides a tool and guidance for Malian graduates to deal with the past, the present, and the future. Instead of predicating a specific kind of life course, the future implies *la chance* of whatever kind. Similarly, former deportees refer to *la chance* and new chances and their (imagined) futures, and thereby potentially create new certainties within an omnipresent contingency, as I will show.

Future plans and aspirations – between planning and vague disorientation

The future is the object of multiple forms of social and religious practice and imaginations, as we already have seen with respect to the practice of *maraboutage*. Even if people have no possibility of knowing the future for certain,[22] "the future matters!" as Beckert outlines in his essayistic analysis explaining capitalist dynamics (2016, p. 270). Generally speaking, there are two different ways of approaching the future: to relate it to the past and past experiences, like a memory transferred into time ahead (Koselleck, 2004; Schütz, 1967, p. 61); or to relate to it from the present,

perienced, but confronts a limit, which Koselleck (2004) called the "horizon of expectation" (*Erwartungshorizont*). This incorporates hopes, fears, rational predictions, and speculations.

20 This is based on a respondent's expression (cf. Ludwig, 2017a, p. 12, n. 9).

21 More than that, not having had this chance needs to be accepted as a part of one's destiny, which "everybody has, as people say."

22 Knowing what will eventually happen is impossible, even though it has long been humankind's desire and is intrinsically connected to conceptions of progress in modernity (e.g., Bromber et al., 2015).

as something newly imagined and "yet to come" (Bloch 1986 [1954]). More generally, the future is contingent (Beckert, 2016), undetermined, and contains endless possibilities (Bromber et al., 2015; cf. Ludwig, 2017a, p. 147). This contingency is approached differently in different contexts.[23]

In the Malian context in question, contingency may create uncertainty and fear, but likewise joy or confidence after a forced return (as Salif outlined, for instance). Calling on higher spiritual forces through a *djin*, a *féticheur* or a *marabout* is a way to deal with this contingency and uncertainty. Supposed unawareness of the future[24] can thus be a productive component in general cosmological explanations in West Africa, within the tension between destiny and human agency, where one's future may be outlined, but open for human activation at the same time. Related to this, Charles Piot (2010) speaks of a "nostalgia for the future," developed in West Africa since the fall of the Berlin wall. It describes a positive longing for the future, based on the wish to change the present and the conviction that anything else would be better than present suffering. Belief in a certain destiny, even if that destiny needs to be activated, can provide certainty; a narrative use of *la chance* after deportations links in here, as I will show.

Respondents appeared to approach the contingencies and unexpectednesses of the future through planning and aspiring, imagining, or longing. The future projections of former deportees were not central to my research, but often formed part of our conversations. References to the future, in fact, often came up without my explicitly asking about their visions and ideas for their later lives, most obviously with regard to their aspiration of leaving again, but also in connection with other projects and future plans that they wanted to share. Not least, many people's everyday activities may eventually relate to preparing for the future, such as Seku's reflecting on and actively waiting for upcoming possibilities. Some respondents talked about their future endeavors in a quite open-ended and vague way, while others had very concrete plans and visions. In this context, *la chance* was related to a specific orientation toward the future. The unexpected "sprout" of *la chance* would, in fact, in this case become something desired. Simultaneously, this narrative relation provided a repertoire of how to get along. Thus, a conversation might go "if he has *la chance*, he will be able to leave again" referring to a new potential

23 Central works on future-making in modernity, dealing with this contingency, are related to money, risk, and capitalism (cf., e.g., Beckert, 2016; Appadurai, 2013; Taleb, 2007). Risk and luck, success and failure are the most central terminology here.

24 Predicting "the future, based on what we already know, is the major source of uncertainty, because it leaves us vulnerable to surprise" (Ludwig, 2017a, p. 103). Ludwig draws on Taleb's analogy with the black swan and circumstance that we "continuously refuse to expect the unexpected" (2007).

success in adventure, or "he will be able to set up a business," or "he will be successful with his agricultural work," referring to concrete economic opportunities arising on the spot. Often, these narrations were very similar to expressions of the supposed adventurer's way of trying and seeing not least what makes "a man."

Broulaye, for instance, was committed to setting up a business. At the time he was making preparations, so he regularly commuted between the nearby larger city and the tiny village in order to establish contacts and plan what his little business could be about. Realistic opportunities were to step into the mobile phone sector by selling credit and sim cards, to trade agricultural products, or to do some kind of support work in the market – for instance, selling mattresses, as Brahima did in Bamako, or assisting a wheel seller, like his friend Ousmane. He reasoned, "If I have *la chance*, it will work out. If not, I will need to see whether I have to go and search for money elsewhere." In his view, there was a possibility that a chance might come along that would allow him to realize his plan and set up a business. He could not be sure that this would occur, but it might happen, as he had observed from other cases where things had worked out similarly. The least he could do was to prepare, actively engage, and look out for his chance if it came. For the time being, his future was bound up with staying and engaging where he was.[25] If things didn't work out, he would need to adjust and look for an alternative. *La chance* in this respect provided narrative guidance and certainty. There might be a new chance in the future.

The commonest way of framing a new adventure was to introduce *la chance* between vague imagining and concrete planning, as one oscillated between staying and leaving. Former deportees' and other young men's planning and aspirations were being centrally impacted by today's constrained mobilities. Particularly those who had already made several attempts at leaving and risked potential deportation, often expressly refused to go on a clandestine migration again, reminding us of the state discourse of safe migration. The argument would be: "If I have *la chance*, I will be able to get a visa. I do not want to take the land route" (cf. Chapter 6). Adama's comment was: "This is not the normal way." Some would reflect on "normal" or rather "safer" ways in a manner that was sometimes scarcely realistic. One respondent said that, if he were to leave again, he would rather go by plane and continued: "If I can't get hold of enough money, I may go by land instead. But if I do find the money, I would rather stay and use it to establish something here" (Group discussion, 11-1-2015). The "if," which implies a new chance, repeatedly points to the critical relevance of money in relation to leaving in a "safe" and legal way rather than "unsafely" and clandestinely over land. If his financial situation allowed, he

25 Many conversations with young deported men during field work were on their possible future projects, similarly prefaced with "if I have *la* chance".

would either take off again by plane or build up something on the spot – the latter option resembling Broulaye's reference to *la chance*. These comments hint at the contingency of the future and a person's potential chance of leaving or staying, but also at indecisiveness about what would be the right way. This kind of vague argumentation and uncertainty might well be interpreted as a sign of disorientation.

Contingency and indeterminacy are integral parts of the everyday for this age group in particular (e.g., Schulz, 2002). According to Beckert (2016), "fictionality points to the openness of the future, which makes expectations contingent." What will happen eventually is unknown. However, "contingency negates the idea that expectations are correct in the aggregate" (p. 10). "Fictional expectations" on the one hand mean actors' images of "future states of the world, the way they visualize causal relations, and the ways they perceive their actions influencing outcomes," which could be related to common-sense knowledge of *la chance*; while "rational expectations" propose "that actors' expectations, at least in the aggregate, equal the statistically expected value for a variable" (ibid.).[26] Both seem to be intrinsically impossible. Nothing can be sure, even if expectations build on experiences one has previously had. In other words, there can be no "reliable" expectations, rather humans act against a background of unawareness, risk, and contingency, and need to be flexible and continuously revise and adjust their expectations and actions according to contingent outcomes and experiences over and over again. Imagined futures are thus a crucial component of the social, economic, and political order itself (ibid., p. 11). Even if former deportees in southern Mali act against a background of supposed destiny, which implies that part of a person's future is predetermined, the role of contingency is central, as stated above. Expectations may be raised but remain permanently fictitious. More than that, for adventurers to stay active and open to the unexpected appears very (post)modern in the end, taking (post)modern ascriptions of flexibility, adaptability, and openness into account.

Some deportees seemed to be very specific – one might even say "rational" – in their planning of future activities. They concretely prepared for *la chance* to come. Brahima, for instance, had very concrete plans for re-emigrating. One day, after all his talk about longing to leave, all his insistence on the impossibility of doing so and on his obligation to stay (cf. Chapter 6, *la bouillie*), he declared to my surprise:

> I'm in the process of preparing. I've done all my papers. I have prepared all the papers that allow going on an adventure through the legal channels. Everything

26 Beckert explains further: "According to rational expectations theory, actors make use of all available information, which suggests that outcomes do not differ systematically from the forecasts made by the dominant economic model" (2016, p. 10). His argumentation very much refers to a materialist, capitalist world, but he says it is also applicable to societies shaped by other cosmologies and religions less related to the economy (2016, p. 3).

> is ready. I don't have the visa yet, but all the papers you have to file to get the visa. I looked for all these papers. (Brahima, 12-12-2015)

His aim was to obtain a visa to Europe, which he considered a (symbolically) much "better" place than Africa (see also Chapters 4 and 6). When I asked more questions, he detailed the steps he had already taken to get a tourist visa: getting a certificate to show he had a secure income in Mali, an invitation from a host in a European country, and a guarantee of insurance while abroad. Everything sounded structured and planned. In the end, however, his plan never came to anything. Possibly his plans were merely the product of some kind of wishful thinking recreated only in our conversation. Up to the present time of writing, Brahima remains in Bamako. Even if he actually was in the process of organizing his administrative papers, he would never have been able to obtain a visa. It would be highly unlikely for somebody like him, lacking substantial financial resources, education, and the necessary close networks, to be able to acquire such a document. Doing so depends on external forces – in this case the decision of the embassy. But his planning and organizing kept him busy in the meantime. And it was the only thing he could do. He put himself in a position of readiness: he prepared. As a narrative strategy, moreover, it created the impression – for himself as well as his interlocutors – that he would be taking off again soon, thus continuing physically mobile and active. Narrating, sharing, and imagining again appear not only as deeply agentic acts in light of given constraints, but also as preparatory ones. Through stories we make meaning out of the past, the present, and the future.[27] Brahima's state of immobility included a very concrete, albeit still imagined, state of mobility in the future. In this forward-looking spirit, his being was constitutively and existentially upgraded.

For others, this kind of *chance* of leaving again or setting up a business would eventually be realized someday. Yakouba, for instance, managed to establish a small fish-culturing project through a family friend who had a contact in an NGO. Little by little, he was able to contribute to the family income. The youth in the village now talk about his project, and say that they want to do the same. Success becomes a source of envy and role model for others – no matter whether achieved through migration or not. Idrissa, another deportee in Bamako, on the other hand, emigrated again to France eight years after his deportation (after he had been unfortunately and unexpectedly caught in a Paris street without papers during daylight hours). For years afterwards, it seemed he had primarily been living and longing to return to Europe. "Everything is much better than here in Africa," he said, following the

27 Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2008) speaks of the "narrativity" of "living to tell the tale" in reference to Clifford Geertz: "the only thing that humans could not seem to live with is the idea that life might be utterly random, meaningless and absurd. Resilient narratives reframe adverse events in order to make them meaningful, purposeful, and, … 'for the best'" (p. 44).

same narrative as Brahima before. "If I have the money, I will go back to France," he repeated frequently.[28] It seemed like an immovable fixation. Idrissa lived partly on "*petits jobs*," but mostly on money sent by a cousin in France in whose house he was living in Bamako. "He has to go abroad," the cousin's wife declared firmly. Half a year later, Idrissa actually arrived at Paris airport. A relative with French citizenship had written a letter of invitation and the powerful family networks provided the obligatory resources – a full bank account and insurances – that fortunately enabled him to obtain a visa. Today, he is even married to a French woman, originally from the Ivory Coast, and has finally received a residence permit. At last, he has had *la chance*.

When former deportees "make" the future, *la chance* is intrinsically connected to imaginations, aspirations, and hope, but importantly also to the certainties and securities of real-life chances and social becoming after deportations, even if they do not necessarily withstand statistical evidence. This is most obvious in respect to the hegemonic foil of leaving (again) and one's real migratory chances. A short comparison with the Gallup World Poll (GWP)[29], for instance, is useful: This well-established survey found that "32% of respondents in sub-Saharan Africa had a desire to emigrate, 4% planned to do so within the next year and 1% were making relevant preparations" (Carling & Schewel, 2017, p. 5), like Brahima and Idrissa. Obviously, making preparations still differs considerably from actually leaving in the end, but this percentage seems minimal. Considering the overarching administrative mobility restrictions, it is almost negligible. Such expectations can thus barely be called "rational." And yet, after deportation, many people continue to aspire to leave again or try to do so, and some actually make it in the end. Mohammed, another former deportee, in Seku's village, illustrated the point convincingly:

> My elder brother left on an adventure in 2000, and was deported in 2001. I got ready to leave as well. He recommended me to stay as he would not want me to confront the same difficulties. I said no, I would leave because everybody's chances differ: It's possible that I would not see the same difficulties as him. Later, when I was also deported, I handed the same advice to my little brothers: They did not accept it either. The one that comes right after me is in a gold mining site. It's now two years that he has been there in Senegal. (Small Group discussion, 11-7-2015)

28 This was most obvious, when Modibo, Idrissa's childhood friend, visited for holidays. We met on the patio of the house where I was staying in Bamako. Idrissa wanted me to get to know his friend. Both kept talking about Modibo's life in France as a (today regularized) night guard and the time they spent together in Paris back then. Idrissa needs to return was their continuously repeated joint conclusion.

29 Since 2005, the GWP has tracked "over 100 crucial world issues affecting people's lives" in 160 countries worldwide in the form of representative surveys. Migratory aspirations are one part of it: https://www.gallup.de/182702/gallup-world-poll.aspx, accessed 31 October 2021.

Repeated deportations do not act as a deterrent, even if underlined by an elder brother, as this quote clearly illustrates. The success of a neighbor, or some acquaintance, can suffice to convince someone that they have a similar possibility of success.[30] To put it another way, even if there is a low probability of making it, the fact that "somebody has made it" is enough reason for somebody else to try it too (cf. also Belloni, 2015, p. 110).[31] In Koselleck's sense, building on past as well as "alien" experiences (cf. Koselleck, 2004, p. 259) – the same may appear in vital conjunctures experienced by others[32] – manifests a knowledge of the possibility and thus creates the expectation (even if "fictional") of a "real" and new intervention of *la chance* to enable not only a successful migratory adventure, but also the building-up of a small project on the ground. Ludwig has convincingly shown how such knowledge of the existence of *la chance* can eventually build into an everyday certainty for Malian graduates (cf. Ludwig, 2017a). It is knowledge transferred from the past to the future (p. 169), and Malian deportees do very much the same thing insofar as all the contingencies lived out through imagining and aspiring at first are then applied to what Beckert termed "fictional expectations," pointing to the openness of the future.

In this way, *la chance* is a means and motor to keep people hoping and imagining, planning and potentially realizing new futures.[33] Brahima concretely prepared and Idrissa eventually took off. Yakouba had a small project and Broulaye prepared for a little business. In sum, future-making by former deportees and adventurers was narrated and practiced through remaining open to the unexpected, yet required *la chance* if it was to be taken further, if people were to leave again and eventually have success. Noemi Steuer, Michelle Engeler, and Elisio Macamo (2017) speak of "elusive futures" for many African youth, who assume that any kind of action implies the possibility of acting in the same way again in the future (p. 13).[34] Through experiencing, narrating, collectively sharing and most importantly

30 Ludwig describes how there can be 1000 Malian graduates applying for one position in the *concours* (competition) for the public service, making success a statistical impossibility, but still people try and believe in *la chance* (2017a, p. 136).

31 "Perceived luck can play a major role in people's key decisions" as authors from gambling studies have suggested (Smith et al., 1996; cf. Belloni, 2015, p. 111).

32 Alber (2016) widens the concept of vital conjunctures that form individual experience to include those that also affect a person's social context.

33 Jackson even discusses luck as the only chance for youth in Africa against a backdrop of violence which appears "as the logic of imagination loses touch with the logic of social practice, desperate fantasies and actions are born" (2005a, p. xxiii).

34 With the aim of going beyond concepts such as "extended presence" (Nowotny, 1989) or "waithood" (Howana, 2012), the young adults Steuer, Engeler, and Macamo describe also lack a large range of opportunities in comparison to times before, but are not waiting for adulthood. They go on in different spheres of their social lives and thus are socially becoming everyday (2017, p. 22).

actively going on and taking care, not least in terms of their spiritual and moral development, former deportees effectively contribute to preparing the ground for a new future. "Collective immobility" (Kahn, 2013, p. 529) has become a shared experience and reality; (collectively) imagining new futures may do the same. In ending this chapter, I want to question what the reality of massive deportations and immobilizations could eventually imply for the social imagery of migratory success and its supposed "failure" likewise.

Revisiting the imaginary of migratory success

Under conditions post deportation, the primary and also newly imagined future in which one leaves again appears to be part and parcel of people's being, remembering, and aspiring. Against the background of taken-for-granted mobility cultures and horizons of expectation that imply that one will leave, the intense talking and longing connected with leaving again constitute old and new (imagined) realities and futures, which are essential for people's (social) being and self-image, particularly when narrated and collectively shared – thus "discursively imagined" as described in the last chapter (cf. Schulz, 2002, p. 822). In the end, does this imply a change in the imaginary of migratory success?

In Mali and other countries, migration has become a phenomenon "fetish," like "a god-thing" (Bazin, 2008), as described above, due to the importance of the income generated and the political construction accompanying it (Lima, 2005; Quiminal, 2002). Thus denunciations of the adverse effects of this (migratory) culture, made through safe migration campaigns and by demonizing "irregular" migration and reinforced by the externalization of European borders, are hard to accept, even if these effects are traumatic and deadly in their contemporary form. Simultaneously, a longing for abroad is increasingly part of the conflict between the need for youth to move – and its being taken for granted that they will move – on account of a lack of prospects on the spot and the constraints placed on their doing so. Deportations and border restrictions contest and even reverse these practices and imaginations, spoiling previously entertained hopes and aspirations that relate desires for consumption to family expectations. Jackson speaks of a "failure of hope" (2005, p. xx) and Kleist refers to the "mobility paradox" (2017b) in a similar way. And yet, after deportation, many people continue to aspire and go on where they are or try to leave again. The imaginary of traveling is overwhelmingly convincing and established (e.g., Kleist & Jansen, 2016; Gaibazzi, 2015b; Mbembe, 2007); more than that, it is based on the conviction that one still has chances oneself, built on the security of others' migratory success.

One can argue that the uncertainty that many encounter after deportation, particularly when stuck in situations of immobility, has led to narratives of progress and success being increasingly linked to the "global horizons" (Graw & Schielke,

2012) of migrant destinations: "People repeatedly equate migration with their hopes for a secure future, for themselves, but especially for their families and children" (Boehm, 2009, p. 354). Based on a respondent using the metaphor of the trampoline to talk about Portugal as a destination, Henrik Vigh figured that "migration in itself comes to function as a technology of the imagination in which envisioned migratory trajectories open up imagined worlds and possibilities" (Vigh, 2009b, p. 105). Thus migration, itself an imagined aim, opens the way to new imaginaries and futures perceived through the experiences of migrants and potentially deportees as well (pp. 92f; cf. Gardner, 1995).

Political interventions by the European Union have substantially externalized, constrained and reversed migrations within sub-Saharan Africa today (Gaibazzi et al., 2017) and have rendered "success" through adventure much less likely, but even after several "failed" migratory attempts the hegemonic notion of success through migrating largely persists in the collective imaginary, connected to courage, masculinity, and worldliness as well as potential social mobility for one's entire kin. There are still few alternative discourses that discourage people from undertaking these perilous adventures. Rather, the collective imaginary stigmatizes the immobility of young people considering it a breakdown in the adolescent life cycle (Gonin & Kotlok, 2012), especially for men. Simultaneously, ever more restrictive migratory policies increasingly challenge these hegemonic conceptions. A change of attitude seems to be developing not least in light of the large number of deportations, and more recently humanitarian and transit returns, from Libya and other African countries and thousands of deaths in the Sahara and the Mediterranean – even though, as I suggested, intra-African deportations are considered less grave than deportations from Europe. "Individual failure" still needs to be halted, though, in view of the collective conception. Consequently, a "failed" adventure may be internalized and silenced or become an issue between mother and son in order to retain respect, as I have shown before, and not least to keep up the societal hope (Hage, 2003).

Even so, as I have said, in recent years there have been more young people and their families declaring that they will stay and engage on the spot, and more community initiatives supporting them. Interestingly, their discourses resemble those of the state and the EU. Moreover, the state is promoting a double discourse, on the one hand "fighting" irregular migration, and on the other valorizing migrants' roles and promoting legal ways simultaneously. One can hear stories about successful returnees in many places. For instance, "Samakirikora" a development project of former migrants who left around 1960 from the region of Kayes has contributed to developing the villages around the area and become well known (field notes, 10-

28-2015).[35] This contributes to the "horizon" of expecting a successful and dignified return for the benefit both of oneself and one's close family and friends. For many, the adventure remains "the last way out," but it could also be "the next possible option," while others stay.

I have framed deportations as turning points and vital conjunctures, thus providing space, or rather enforcing space, to develop new imaginations and aspirations. Literature has also discussed imaginations and aspirations as fundamental motors for action and (potentially radical) change, which may provide a new repertoire of "more fundamental ways of grappling with the future" (Bromber et al, 2015, p. 3).[36] Hannah Arendt, who was never able to fully develop her theory of imagination, emphasized the power of imagination for both cognition and action and the capacity to change facts.[37] Likewise, as often cited, Arjun Appadurai (1996) coined the idea of the "capacity to aspire," as a navigational capacity, which essentially means that there is agency as long as people can aspire. Consequently, imaginations and aspirations are not only central to any kind of agency, but at the core of our activity including the possibility for creating new or alternative ways to go about things. Bottici complements Arendt's individual approach with the psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis defining the imaginary as something fundamentally social and related to the very being of humankind. It is based on the idea that each social entity needs an imaginary to exist and vice versa. Thus, "imagination is before the distinction between 'real' and 'fictitious.' In other words, it is because radical imagination exists that 'reality' exists for us – and, therefore, one can act, it exists *tout court*" (Castoriadis, 1994, pp. 321f; as quoted by Bottici, 2011, p. 62).[38] While Arendt sees in (individual) imaginations something that is absent, for Castoriadis the social imaginary makes our "reality" in the form of a complex entanglement of individuals which can only exist within this social context and imaginary.[39] With-

35 Together with people of other nationalities, Senegalese, Algerians, Burkinabe, Guineans, they returned voluntarily from France, installed themselves in a village and built up a sound agriculture.

36 As Bromber et al. (2015) argue "Witnessing accelerated change and thereby the inherent openness of the future seems to give rise to more fundamental ways of grappling with the future in the form of ideologies, revised forms of social semantics and socialization" (p. 3).

37 Imagination is the faculty that mediates between the universal and the particular by providing both schemata for cognition and exemplars for action (Arendt & Beiner, 1982, pp. 72ff).

38 The term 'radical' needs to be understood as follows: "its political meaning points to the need of rethinking imagination in relation to the project of autonomy, which, as we will see, is a crucial concern for Castoriadis. On the more general philosophical level, the term radical … is also what can be called a primary imagination. This consists in the faculty of producing images in the largest possible sense (that of 'forms', 'Bilder'), that is, images without which there would not be any thought at all, and which, therefore, precede any thought" (Bottici, 2011, p. 62).

39 For further explanation see Bottici, 2011, pp. 63ff.

out further scrutinizing this concept, I want to highlight Castoriadis's contribution – to posit that the social imaginary makes reality underlines its encompassing character and existential meaning, in this case in relation both to the migratory adventure and success ruptured by deportations and potential new chances.

In Arendt's sense, imagination is, furthermore, the basis for critical thinking on the political, because it enables us to reflect on others and to think from within others' shoes. This allows scrutinizing and reflecting upon the community and, eventually, potentially creating change. For deportees and their social circles, change, in the form of an unexpected situation created through the rupture caused by deportation, is first of all radically enforced from the outside. It incites a reversal of the migratory project and has long-lasting effects. This turning point may lead to a standstill, stuckness and (bare) immobility or, as this study has shown, multiple, agentic and navigational ways of going about things and continuing under conditions post deportation. In this, the capacity to aspire, imagine, and long for the future – possibly a new adventure, but also a business on-site and eventually taking care for one's close relations in whatever sense – plays a central role in everyday lives and is a potential motor for productivity, evolution, and potential change from within on the actor's part.

According to Arendt, however, imaginations may be ambivalent: a source of both autonomy and heteronomy (Bottici, 2011, pp. 60f), which means they can be a means of emancipation and thus a critique of what is given, but also a means of subjection to it.[40] Castoriadis sets the creation of images in a primary imagination before any imaginary and reality. Fundamentally concerned with autonomy, it is here that he sees the source of any critique: in the radical capacity to question one's own images lies the possibility of critique (p. 66). Accepting this, Bottici develops the "imaginal" as "what is made from images" to build a bridge between Arendt's individual concept of imagination and the social imaginary, which eventually allows one to navigate between the two, making absent imaginations present in the double sense of creating something new, but also of denying facts. It is a theoretical tool, as she says, to grasp how to come up with new imaginations in a world full of established images.

In terms of the imaginary of migratory success constituting people's "reality," which is made from images, this would mean that people needed to fundamentally question the images produced in this way and come up with alternatives. In addition to the contingent and uncertain everyday, deportations link in here unexpectedly and may question the images established. This is where Johnson-Hanks sees space for another potential future. On the one hand, people may resist European borderscapes by denying the danger of death and the impossibility of making it.

40 Imaginations may lead to denying factual truth (cf. Arendt, 1972, p. 5), which in politics, for instance, may foster citizens' subjectivations.

However, increased migration might lead to ever more restrictive migratory policies, unprecedented levels of migratory brokerage, more detentions, deaths, and deportations, with the political system continuing to brutally subject individuals. Simultaneously, others would continue to "succeed" or to return autonomously and contribute to "development," which would help to keep up the established imaginary. Alternative ways out could rather be imagined by creating sustainable possibilities for self-determined development, thus enabling people to stay or building realistic safe and legal migratory opportunities, albeit circular ones for many – even if such images would almost fall under Beckert's label of "rational expectations" as they are close to realistic and also pragmatic scenarios. Radical reimaginations, in Castoriadis's sense might rather direct toward global freedom of movement, mobility, and staying as well, a world of equals and of justice, or toward supraterritorial communities of refugees and migrants (such as the proposal for *Refugia* by Cohen & Van Hear, 2019); all these could be labelled utopian as well. Still, successful leaving and returning and autonomous decisions to stay after deportation are what regenerate people and provide new experiences that may persist, while potentially also widening the "horizon of expectations" and reference for their imaginations and further actions, by criticizing current conditions and engendering new images and eventually new realities.

According to Appadurai, the "capacity to aspire" allows those with more experiential knowledge a wider spectrum of possible goals to envision and reach for, which are usually unequally distributed among richer and poorer populations and thus economically, socially, and politically shaped. In modernity, however, this connection between experiences and expectations is said to be increasingly falling apart. Globalization and new media have opened unprecedented ways of consuming "alien" experience.[41] Things can be aspired to that were not imaginable before. Moreover, our world seems to have become even more contingent or at least is perceived as such. It was international migration itself that created the imaginary of success, built on established migratory cultures in Mali and thus enabling "global horizons" in the last decades. Migrations that are forcefully reversed or prove fatal produce more and more experiential knowledge, collectively shared, of the complexities of today's world. Adventurers and, in a particular way, the deported demonstrate a specific kind of worldliness and wisdom, gained through their suffering, even if it may be silenced. But the realities they have experienced question the "seemingly established future." Still, it remains an oscillation between leaving and staying, disoriented, vague, subverting, and deeply agentic at the same time.

41 From a case study of the urban poor in Mumbai, Appadurai figures that their activist engagement and multiple connections lead to a widening of horizons.

In order to enhance the capacity to aspire and, in Arendt's terms, the capacity for change through imaginations, Appadurai appeals to a "compulsory cosmopolitanism" that consists in drawing on "the habit of imagining possibilities, rather than giving in to the probabilities of externally imposed change."[42] It is similar to Beckert's fictional and rational expectations. As I have said, deportations are externally imposed and probable, therefore, changes of the latter kind. Former deportees do, in fact, go on and imagine possibilities, narratively framed by *la chance*. A society put under constraint by migratory restrictions, immobilizations, involuntary and forced returns, has no other choice than to go on. On the one hand, the migratory success story is kept up – sometimes by only supposedly successful migrants, in France but merely visiting until they have sufficient earnings to distribute gifts, often showing up in a neat suit or even driving a new car up to a remote village (field notes, 12-28-2015). Others never return or break their ties with the family for shame at not having made it. These illusions suggest one's ability to participate in the globalized world of consumption, but more importantly, to move oneself and one's (extended) family up the socio-generational scale and become someone. It is like grasping at straws to retain dignity, where external forces render an autonomous life impossible and deeply endanger one's dignity as a good person and one's prospects of becoming someone.

At the same time, the large numbers of deportees in Mali, their organizations and the air of everydayness and normalcy associated with them have created conspicuous social realities. The deaths in the Mediterranean are commemorated and ritualized, and bereaved parents, communities, and the diaspora step in, trying to create alternatives for their youth. Still, the economic and educational alternatives really existing on the ground have not been able to compete with the adventurous ways so far, and there are literally no safe or legal ways. Rather migrants may be exalted as "martyrs" and, together with the commemoration of the shipwrecked, incorporated into the cultural heritage of migration (see Sylla & Schultz, 2020) that this study began with. At the same time these moves and actions constitute a vivid resistance against the externalization of the European border regime. Obviously, the established images have been questioned, but there is quite some way to go. So far, the so-called horizons of expectations may have been adjusted, diversified,

42 "By the ethics of possibility, I mean those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope, that expand the field of the imagination, that produce greater equity in what I have called the capacity to aspire, and that widen the field of informed, creative, and critical citizenship. … By the ethics of probability, I mean those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that … are generally tied to the growth of a casino capitalism which profits from catastrophe and tends to bet on disaster. … I offer these two contrasting ethical styles to suggest that beneath the more conventional debates and contradictions that surround what we call globalization there is a tectonic struggle between these two ethics." (Appadurai, 2013, p. 295).

and widened, but they have hardly completely changed. Meanwhile, people go on imagining and believing in *la chance*.

Concluding remarks

The aim of this chapter was to build a bridge between the conditions of uncertainty and potential stuckness that former deportees are subjected to after deportation, and their finding and expressing intrinsic subjectivities in the narrative as well as a practical relation to *la chance*, *kunna* in Bamanakan, future making, and a broader cosmology, eventually providing another level of meaning. To this end, I have reflected on deportations as rupture-like events, examining their processual character and vital conjunctures, building ground for productivity and potential change over time.

In deportees' narratives and practices, spirituality and religion, sense- and future-making, luck, success, failure and *la chance* coalesce in a very specific form. People imagine and go on, between the tensions of destiny and agency. *La chance* links in here. Practices, such as consulting the *marabout*, and speaking of a new *la chance*, show ways to deal with the contingency and uncertainty of the everyday and the future, under conditions post deportation. They create certainty and not least new potential imaginations and possible futures. The supposed unawareness of the future can thus be a productive component in general cosmological explanations in West Africa, within the tension between destiny and human agency, where one's future may be outlined, but that is open for human activation at the same time.

Susann Ludwig coined the phrase "the happy Sisyphus" or rather "the conscientious Sisyphus" (2017b, p. 173) to describe the Malian graduate. Similarly, former deportees go on – sometimes, however, in a state of severe restless stress. In reference to Clifford Geertz, she concludes *la chance* does not make the world less uncertain, but it renders randomness intelligible. *La chance* supports graduates' feeling that they are "on top of things" and thereby "makes action possible for [them] at all" (Geertz, 1975, p. 12). Former deportees may be deeply constrained in their everyday, but *la chance* may provide them with a sensation of additional autonomy and agency, as if having *kunna* implies a secure belief in success if one engages for it.

Not least, through collective sharing and narrating meaning is recreated, even after deportation. In this sense, the supposed "failure" of the migratory adventure, can productively allow space for creating alternatives and new certainties, not least for surviving with dignity and a more spiritual quality in one's social relations. The immobility–mobility continuum, from bare immobility via imagined mobility to a new and real mobility is often the pivot and mode of being. While massive "failures" have led to the collectivization and normalization of deportation experiences, the imagery of migratory success appears largely a hegemonic, even if debated, foil.