

28.

Returning migrants: from disillusion to integration initiatives in the South-East, North and Central regions of Senegal

Aly Tandian¹



MIGRANT AND DIASPORA CONTRIBUTIONS



RETURN AND REINTEGRATION

Abstract: This chapter examines the impact of various forms of return on migrants, their families and communities in Senegal, in particular in terms of resilience and/or development. It focuses on spontaneous and independent return, on voluntary return (taking place with IOM support), and on forced return (expulsion). It draws on data collected through individual and group interviews with returning migrants. Results show that migrants who return voluntarily tend to evoke an idyllic image of migration, whereas migrants who were forced to return tend to experience disillusion. Some migrants use money and experience gained abroad to become entrepreneurs; they promote the image of returnees as an asset. However, given Senegal's migratory tradition, migration journeys are considered positive even when returnees come home "empty-handed".

Data sources

The different types of return (spontaneous/independent, voluntary/with International Organization for Migration (IOM) support and forced/expulsion) are analysed using individual and group interviews with returning migrants, and quantitative data collected in south-eastern (Tambacounda, Kédougou and Kolda), northern (Matam) and central (Kaolack and Louga) Senegal.

Principal conclusions

In Senegal, migrant returns cannot be attributed only to disillusion with the migrant experience, even though that is the case for many migrants. Some migrants used money transfers and the experience they gained abroad to become entrepreneurs. The image of returning migrants as entrepreneurs is a valuable asset; for a long time, the members of the Senegalese diaspora were considered by the "Boy Town" urbanites as uneducated hicks incapable of launching entrepreneurial activities in their country of origin.

In Senegal, migration is a legend that has set the daily pace of life for people for many years. It was during the colonial period that the Senegalese came to be known in the West African subregion as "great travellers", who journeyed long distances to conquer new territories, establish themselves in many different places, and optimize their opportunities and chances for success. Consequently, Senegalese society looks on such journeys as positive acts intended to form the personality and enable the person leaving to acquire (im)material goods, even if that person experiences hardship or comes home empty-handed.

¹ Observatoire Sénégalais des Migrations, Gaston Berger University of Saint-Louis du Sénégal.

The desire to migrate to Europe made itself felt more frequently during the 1990s, when popular television channels reinforced that illusion. Television broadcasts used the magic of images to heighten the allure and create an image of other parts that sustained a migratory culture. In the local discourse, some returning migrants – who became entrepreneurs, thanks to money transfers and the experience they acquired abroad – proudly evoke an idyllic image of migration, whereas those who were forced to return or expelled cast a very disillusioned eye on their ventures. Many of the latter receive IOM support to help them reintegrate.

Using a socioanthropological approach, individual and group interviews were conducted with returning migrants, and quantitative data collected, in south-eastern (Tambacounda, Kédougou and Kolda), northern (Matam) and central (Kaolack and Louga) Senegal, in order to analyse the various types of return (spontaneous/independent, voluntary/with IOM support and forced/expulsion). This article is interesting in that it also considers the impact that these different types of return had on migrants, their families and communities, in terms of resilience and/or development, in these different parts of Senegal.

28.1. Sociodemographic and economic characteristics of returning migrants

A survey of 66 people (40 from Tambacounda, 12 from Kédougou and 14 from Kolda) – all of whom had returned to Senegal, and most of whom had taken the irregular migration corridor to Libya – showed that most had left their country of origin for the first time between 2000 and 2015. Moreover, 89 per cent of returning irregular migrants had left their regions of origin to travel abroad only once or twice; over 11 per cent, from all regions, had left three to five times.

The data collected revealed that some of the persons interviewed had migrated for the first time in previous decades. Most of those people were originally from rural areas. They migrated from one to five times, whereas those migrating between 2000 and 2015 did so more often (three to five times).

That statistic is much higher in the Kolda region, where one out of three returning irregular migrants had left the region three, four and even five times to travel abroad. This has one of two explanations: either the migrants had papers enabling them to come and go whenever they wanted, or they had made repeated (failed) attempts to migrate.

Before travelling abroad, most of the migrants lived in rural areas: on average, in all the regions considered, 93 per cent came from rural areas, as opposed to 7 per cent from urban areas. In terms of occupation, almost all the returning irregular migrants confirmed that, before migrating, they had worked in various fields: on average, in all the regions considered, 50 per cent of the migrants had worked in agriculture, 25 per cent in animal husbandry, 7 per cent in trade, 2 per cent in the hospitality industry and 5 per cent in transport. In addition, 22 per cent of the returning irregular migrants were educated, approximately 7 per cent up to baccalauréat level or higher.

There are several reasons why these returning irregular migrants decided to abandon a previous occupation – agriculture, animal husbandry, trade or transport – to migrate. In all the regions considered, most of them spoke of constraints relating to financial shortfalls (28%), barriers to saving (24%) or harsh working conditions (18%).

Financial shortfalls, barriers to saving and harsh working conditions were the main reasons for giving up an occupation and migrating in Tambacounda (75%), Kédougou (52%) and Kolda (63%).

It is nonetheless important to underscore that, in Tambacounda and Kédougou specifically, 16 per cent of returning irregular migrants said that they had abandoned their earlier activities and migrated because the profits made did not belong to them.

28.2. Return of Senegalese migrants: a mix of disillusion and assistance

In Senegal, irregular migration is so complex that it is very difficult to measure; it is also practically impossible to provide exact figures on the phenomenon. The available data are both fragmented and discontinuous, provided in connection with certain highly publicized tragic events that tend to be humanitarian in nature. For example, there are no statistics on migration to Spain, which is one of the two countries receiving the most irregular migrants in Europe. For Italy, the Ministry of the Interior only provides figures on the numbers arriving in the country by sea: 5,981 Senegalese in 2015, 10,327 in 2016 and 6,000 in 2017 (Ndione, 2018).

Over the past 10 years, numerous Senegalese attempting to migrate have been repatriated, their irregular status having prevented them from realizing their dreams in the countries of transit or destinations. Such is the case for a number of Senegalese who were living in the Niger or Morocco. Citizens of Senegal do not need entry or resident visas to enter either country, according to the legislation of the Economic Community of West African States for the former and bilateral agreements for the latter. They can stay in the country for 90 days without being troubled by the police.

Some of those irregular migrants returned to Senegal on their own, whereas others were able to return thanks to assistance provided by IOM in the context of its mandate. In 2017, for example, 3,023 Senegalese aged from 9 to more than 63 years, but for the most part between 18 and 26, were able to return to their country of origin (ibid.).

The assisted returnees were men and women, and came from all 14 regions of Senegal, although the majority were from Tambacounda, Kédougou and Kolda. In that part of Senegal, the lack of youth employment opportunities was often cited as the main reason for migrating.

As mentioned earlier, several returning migrants (spontaneous/independent, voluntary/with IOM support and forced/expulsion) were able to make the original journey thanks to the resources mobilized by their parents. In such cases, repatriation is always deemed a failure. In the eyes of the returning migrants and their parents, such a failure is a source of shame, the repatriated or expelled migrant being deemed to have wasted what little money the family had.

In addition to the disillusioned migrants repatriated under assisted return and reintegration programmes, Senegal also has numerous but often poorly documented cases of voluntary return. The migrants concerned develop – individually or collectively – reintegration initiatives that are of benefit to several members of their communities.

There are also success stories, the outcome of policies to help migrants expelled from their countries of destination to reintegrate. While few in number, such cases are worth pointing out, to highlight the reintegration support provided by the State of Senegal or international institutions.

28.3. Successful reintegration initiatives by returning migrants

In Senegal, after several consecutive years of drought (1972–1973 and 1982–1984), associations of emigrants based in France ploughed money into agricultural production, investing heavily in, for example, village irrigation systems and the construction of water storage facilities. More recently, they seem to have refocused their investments. At individual level, remittances serve to secure food for relatives remaining in the country, but are also sometimes invested in agricultural production activities, to pay for labour and inputs. Unlike migrants active through associations abroad, in Saloum (in central Senegal), migrants preferred to return home, where they sometimes invested financial resources earned while abroad. Examples of returning migrants in four regions of Senegal are given below.

In the Kaolack and Matam regions, voluntary returnees invested in various innovative sectors, drawing on their money transfers and personal experience, whereas in Louga, initiatives were taken thanks to the Regional Council, which organizes an annual “Forum with emigrants”.

28.3.1. Moustapha – Kaolack region – returned to Senegal and invested in agriculture and animal husbandry after several years in Lerida, Spain

Moustapha is currently the mayor of Darou Salam commune, in Kaolack. He migrated in 2005, at the age of 30. He first travelled to France, not as an immigrant, but to participate in the International Agricultural Fair. For that occasion he had a 45-day visa. He was able to make the trip because he was the president of the Cadre Local de Concertation des Producteurs, the local producers’ organization, but above all because he had produced a record 34 tons of seed in 2004. That exploit allowed him to travel to Europe on exchange visits. By the time he returned to Senegal, he had acquired a taste for migration. He applied for and was granted a six-month visa to return to Europe. On this second trip, he left to join a friend based in Lerida, Spain. Three days after his arrival there, he found work in the fields. After four days of work he had earned 400 euros. He did the maths, and decided to stick with that job and to resign from his civil service position with the Ministry for the New Partnership for Africa’s Development.

Moustapha stayed in Lerida for four years without papers (resident permit), which he obtained in 2009. Three months later, he returned to Senegal on vacation. At the end of his vacation, he returned to Spain with one of his wives, his nephew and his son. From 2009 to 2014, he returned to Senegal every year for two months to rest. He decided to return definitively following the 2008 financial crisis, which affected Spain and Europe in general. The primary factor motivating his return to Senegal was the growing financial burden of supporting his family. In addition, he realized that all his children and nephews wanted to join him in Spain. In the end, after much hesitation, he returned to Senegal with his wife as a way of showing his children and nephews that they were not obliged to leave for Europe to succeed.

During his years in Spain, Moustapha invested. Twice he bought a seven-seat car to sell fish – borrowing 2 million CFA francs (3,048 euros) from the Crédit Mutuel for that purpose – but the project did not work out as he had anticipated. Its failure was discouraging. Later, he did some *Opérations Tabaski*,² but his relatives took the sheep without paying. It was for all those reasons that he decided to return to Senegal and manage his investments himself. To prepare for his return, he spent more time in Senegal in order to supervise his affairs more closely. In 2014, he started raising cattle and in 2016, small ruminants. He currently has 90 head of cattle and employs four farmhands to look after them. He has 60 hectares of land. With his wife, he wants to have a market garden on 20 hectares, to grow off-season crops, raise poultry, and plant trees and shrubs. He plans to apply the drip irrigation techniques he learned about in Spain. He is working with a partner to sink a borehole. For his agricultural activities, he employs 13 farmhands for five months and his family year-round. He has opened a money transfer office in Nioro. He plans to continue investing in agriculture, because he loves the work and has the requisite know-how. He has submitted his plan for a market garden to Senegal’s *Fonds de Garantie des Investissements Prioritaires* (a guarantee fund for priority investments). In Spain, he also learned how to stable and manage livestock, a couple of methods for treating certain animal diseases, and how to rapidly fatten cattle. He wants to have an impact on the food security of people in his area, growing vegetables for a more diversified diet and making available cow’s milk thanks to stall milking. He also plans to create jobs in the transformation and commercialization of milk. His only regret is that the young people in the area do not follow his example and want to emigrate, as he was the first in the area to do so. They have watched as he built a concrete structure and acquired assets. When he sees young people leave by land or by sea, he feels that he is partly to blame. The positive side of migration is that it enabled him to acquire knowledge.

² Tabaski, or Eid al-Adha, is the Muslim “Feast of the Sacrifice” or “Feast of Sheep”.

28.3.2. Sidy – Matam region – between Brazzaville and Abidjan, was able to mobilize financial resources to invest in agriculture in Senegal

Sidy was born on 17 January 1963 and is from Matam. He first migrated in 1977. From Dakar, he travelled to Abidjan and Brazzaville, where he lived for 18 years without returning to Senegal. In Brazzaville, he worked as a stonemason. He returned because he felt that his investments in Senegal were not being properly managed by his brothers – the money that he was sending to build his house was being used for other purposes. In Côte d'Ivoire, he was in trade but he also learned agricultural techniques. He has been back in Senegal for 12 years, working in market gardening and animal husbandry thanks to the money he earned as a migrant. He grows maize, peanuts and beans on seven hectares. He employs farmhands under the *métayage* system but also occasionally hires day workers. He owns 22 head of cattle and over 100 sheep and goats. The four employees who look after them receive room and board and are paid 35,000 CFA francs (53 euros) per month. Sidy also has shops in the Republic of the Congo, which are managed by his brothers who stayed there. He plans to continue investing in Senegal, especially in rural development.

28.3.3. Various emigrants – Louga region

Every year, the Regional Council organizes the “Forum with emigrants”, to facilitate their integration (Sall et al., 2010). In Louga, for want of a framework, the emigrants who opted to return voluntarily to their place of origin have for the most part managed to build a dwelling that they occupy with their families or rent out. The rent allows them to meet certain expenses, such as tuition for their children and food. The buildings are often rented to State civil servants posted to Louga. To make up for the lack of an official framework for returning emigrants, a new partnership approach has been put in place: the Regional Council organizes an annual “Forum with emigrants”, to enable the people of Louga as a whole to benefit from their compatriots’ migration; previously, only the migrants’ families benefited from the investments in properties.

The Louga Regional Director of Planning confirmed this in the following terms:

Most of the emigrants’ investments were in buildings, so we tried, at the level of the Regional Council, to organize the Forum with emigrants. The first time, the Forum was organized with local technical services and the emigrants... The aim was to identify the region’s potential in terms of fisheries, animal husbandry, agriculture, trades, etc. Each in his own area of concern tried to set out the potential, to try and orient emigrants who had ideas for projects... For us, we didn’t want the emigrants from Louga to continue investing in Dakar when there were investment possibilities in Louga, especially since the region is bursting with potential. If that potential were properly exploited, the town would benefit. During the Forum with emigrants, we brought the emigrants face-to-face with partners... We decided for the Forum with emigrants to find focal points among emigrants who were from Louga originally but who had settled in Italy, Spain and so on. Those focal points are information relays that enable the emigrants to organize, to think about productive projects (interview with the Louga Regional Planning Director, 21 February 2008).

In addition to the “Forum with emigrants”, the Louga political authorities established a “business wicket”. Along these lines, the Deputy Governor of Louga adds that the “business wicket” can help secure the emigrants’ investments (ibid.).

By launching the “Forum with emigrants” and the “business wicket”, elected officials sought to involve emigrants who had returned voluntarily in local efforts to develop Louga and the neighbouring area.

In one example in Louga, an emigrant who had returned voluntarily, and had always worked in the artistic milieu as a promoter, opened a recording studio that currently employs young people from the town and helps launch the careers of young local talents with a cultural bent.

According to M. Fall, an emigrant who returned voluntarily and is the director of the recording studio, “not a day goes by without some new talent knocking on my door with a demo tape or recording. And in addition to these singers, there are the theatre and dance groups” (interview with M. Fall, 21 February 2008).

It must be pointed out, however, that the investments sometimes founder because of the emigrants' low level of education and the risk that the funds will be used for other purposes by the relatives or friends in charge of managing the activities. Obviously, these economic initiatives have a promising future and are sure to take off at some point.

At the same time as these migrants returned voluntarily to Senegal to invest in the agricultural sector, migrants returning from Libya faced numerous problems relating to their return and socioeconomic reintegration. In the face of those difficulties, IOM introduced a process of assisted voluntary return and reintegration, in order to help Senegalese migrants reintegrate properly into their communities. As part of the reintegration process, IOM provides the returning migrants with information on opportunities in Senegal and informs potential migrants about the risks and dangers of irregular migration. This is the case of Diallo, who benefited from IOM assistance.

28.3.4. Diallo – Kolda region – returned from Libya with IOM assistance in March 2019

Diallo is an emigrant who lived in Libya before deciding to return to Kolda with the help of IOM, which provided him with seed funding to open a mobile phone store and repair shop. According to Diallo, the funding very quickly affected his life for the better.

Diallo is one of the beneficiaries of the roughly 100 IOM projects providing reintegration assistance to returning migrants between June 2017 and June 2019. According to Richard Danziger, IOM Regional Director for West and Central Africa, speaking to *Walf Quotidien* on 25 January 2019, "IOM assistance aims to mitigate the suffering of returning migrants. It also aims to find opportunities for returning migrants, to give a positive, more secure and beneficial face to migration."

*Today, thanks to IOM,
I have a job that allows me
to meet my personal needs
and support my parents.
I never stop advising my
friends who stayed in Libya
to do what I did, and come
back and work in Senegal*

*(interview with Diallo,
26 March 2019).*

28.4. Conclusion

In Senegal, not all returns can be summed up by disillusion, even though many migrants do come back disappointed. Some migrants have become entrepreneurs thanks to money transfers and the experience acquired abroad. The image of the returning migrant as an entrepreneur is a valuable asset, because for many years the members of the Senegalese diaspora were looked on by the "Boy Town" urbanites as uneducated people unable to engage in business initiatives in their country of origin.

The creation of businesses by returning migrants reflects a twofold trend: a sharp increase in the number of entrepreneurs and a strong qualitative improvement in the businesses they create. The forthcoming changes in agriculture are likely to be brought about by these migrants' investments, especially in the central and northern parts of the country, which attract those interested in farming because of their geographical location.

— REFERENCES

- Ndione, B.
2018 *Migration au Sénégal. Profil national 2018*. FMM West Africa, IOM, ANSD.
- Sall, M., S.M. Tall, A. Tandian, A.A. Samb, M.A.K. Sano and M.S. Sylla
2010 International Migration, Social Change and Local Governance in Ourosogui and Louga, Two Small Urban Centres in Senegal. Human Settlements Working Paper Series No. 23. International Institute for Environment and Development, London.