



HAL
open science

The Border : A tool of the State in Coping with the Migration Question

Emma Chaouane

► **To cite this version:**

Emma Chaouane. The Border : A tool of the State in Coping with the Migration Question. Grenzen und Regionale Ströme / Frontières et circulations régionales/ Borders and Regional Circulation, Europa Universität Viadrina et Université Paris 1 Panthéon-La Sorbonne, Jul 2011, Frankfurt Oder, Germany. hal-04463655

HAL Id: hal-04463655

<https://hal.science/hal-04463655>

Submitted on 17 Feb 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Communication

The Border – A tool of the State in Coping with the Migration Question

INTRODUCTION

In France, in 2008, in full electoral period for municipal elections, it wasn't rare to hear speeches justifying the eviction of persons or families without papers. This particular crossing of the border, virtual, between France and Mali, would then allow any Malian to find a whole, deserving identity, that of a free citizen, inside the borders of his country.

This speech also resounds in Mali. The Malian State considers that any Malian, on returning to the country, even if he was expelled, becomes again "a Malian of the inside, as the others"¹. The same speech is held in the direction of every African national having failed in his migratory adventure. Since, Mali becomes a "State of rebound"².

In Mali, the border moves about a variable of adjustment among the others. Between control of its elasticity and process of crystallization guided more particularly by one of its 07 borders, the Malian State illustrates its capacity to rationalize its governance and to exercise its internal sovereignty.

This communication is a paper in progress, following a recent new exploratory fieldwork in the district of Bamako (Feb.-April 2011) and my participation among an excellent and promising group research project directed by Pr. J. Siméant & alii during the last WSF in Dakar (Feb.2011). It will be a question of understanding how the border, set up as political "weapon" against the migrations, creates effects as well on the people as on the State.

My communication will draw for the main part from the empirical data collected during my researches in Mali by participant observations, semi structured interviews and direct observations.

What are the consequences of the crossing of a border, *via* an eviction? Why is Mali, nevertheless known for the porosity of its 7 borders, drafting its first migratory national policy?

I/ Borders in Africa: a History of European Colonial Conquest

The history of the borders of Africa does not lack in debates. Most of the experts agree on their "nonsense" or their "artificiality". The *African Association of London* in 1788, and in 1870 the *Committee of French Africa* participated in the segmentation of the African territory, when powerful Empires, such the Empire of Mali or Ghana, were divided and administered.

¹ Leitmotiv of politicians in Mali and in France in 2006-2011, collected during a precedent political sociology research, dir. Pr Valluy and Pr. J. Freedman (2007), on a new form of political activism based on solidarity and humanism values in France: the R.E.S.F (Education Without Borders Network)

² Conceptualization in progress of new State shapes building new path of exit for the Malian expelled

The management of this division of Africa was finalized during the Conference of Berlin on the 26th February of 1885. Conference led by Chancellor Bismark.

In fact, this conference fixed especially precise rules concerning the appropriation of territories and thus the plan of the borders of the future colonies. A real competition was going to start between both major powers of this period, France and England on one hand and one the other hand, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Spain. So, each of these European States assumed a part of Africa³.

During the 1950s, the fights for the independence and the flow of ideologies (like Pan-Africanism) redrew the balance of power between colonies and their metropolis. The borders were also enlivened and transformed. So, on the eve of the proclamations of independence, according to Fouchet (1994)⁴ "approximately 13 600 km of new borders will be created, half of which will reflect the boundary changes of French West African states (AOF in French)"⁵, from Senegal country to Tchad. This wave of independences had by 1960 resulted in new African States, which met within the Organization of African Unity (OAU). These States used this organization to debate, in 1964, the intangibility of the borders. As a result, 87 % of the African borders⁶ established were inherited from the European colonial conquest⁷.

Such knowledge will help understand the conceptualization of frontier into context. Indeed far from conferring an appropriate shape on its borders, my fieldwork in Mali (2008-2011) shows that according to the nature and to the way someone crossed a border in Africa, the effects can be extremely plural and reveal powerful symbolic charge.

II / The border, one "pass-wall" two-tier

In French literature, the ‘wall passer’ is someone who moves back and forth between borders at will until at one point, he becomes stuck inside the wall. Now, this character of the French literature establishes an allegory which illustrates well what takes place on the borders of Mali, and becomes a reality in political science.

Mali is one of the poorest 5 countries of the world. As a former French colony, there is a historic interdependence which binds Mali and France. The migratory politics of France, as with other member states of the EU, became more coercive and more repressive. In France, where the Malian community is historically the most numerous, the government of President

³ For economic reasons (market opportunities of the industrial revolution)- ideologic and religious aspects (to civilize "inferior races") – for strategic and military perspectives (a great Power must have to access everywhere: supplies, areas control...)

⁴ FOUCHER Michel (1994), *Fronts et frontières*, Fayard : Paris

⁵ Extract in Christian Bouquet, « L’artificialité des frontières en Afrique subsaharienne », *Les Cahiers d’Outre-Mer* [online], 222 | April-June 2003, Accessed online on the 13rd February 2008. URL:<http://com.revues.org/index870.html>

⁶ FOUCHER Michel (1994), *op.cit* p.167

⁷ The remaining 13 % are natural demarcations or were generated by a nationalist push at the time of the independences going against the wishes of Pan-Africanism.

Sarkozy set up, from 2007, one plan of multiannual quotas of evictions. The term "eviction", systematically used by the people I interviewed, is understood as the forced entry of a person to their country of origin in an irregular situation, according to the current laws in the "State of refusal"⁸. This particular crossing of the Malian border locks the person who undergoes it in a new identity, binding and stigmatizing, that of the expelled.

This term is constructed one social which distinguishes itself more and more today from that of the "repulsed person". This nuance in the temporality of the execution of a measure of estrangement distinguishes a repulsed person from an expelled one, who is often installed in the country for several years. However, even if we shall concentrate our communication on Malian expelled, both are, like the wall-passer of Marcel Aymé, eventually prisoners of the border.

1/ From the Malian from the outside to the Malian of the inside, a border crossing without effect?

1.a The entry to a new life of an expelled

The men whom I met, all identified to me, the point at which they felt, they had crossed this virtual border between Paris and Bamako. One arrived at the airport of Bamako-Sénou, alone and without resources, "empty hands", like they said. In light of this sentiment, the expelled Malian rarely dares to go into his village, where the *hard core* of their extended family often still lives. Many dread the glance of their relatives in which they can read the fear, the fear of the future and the dishonor. After having spent between 4 and more 8 years outside of their borders, this undocumented son or girl represents a prestige label⁹ and an informal knot in the transnational network of economic and financial solidarity that the eviction destroys. What provokes strong turbulences in the entire system and has devastating effects within both the family and the ancestral communities, who remain strongly interdependent in Mali.

Some expelled, so stigmatized by the particular crossing of this border between the West and Africa, sometimes find a place in the precarious productive system, whether formal or informal. So, the expelled becomes, again a working strength, almost as the others, in the field or in shops to the "le Grand Marché", where he exploits (again) a know-how often acquired outside of its borders. Others borrow a "moral route" more secure, according to Goffman (1963), as far as the Malian family in Bamako becomes a cell providence, which mitigates the failures and the disengagement of the State. In the face of the potential shame of expulsion, the family becomes an ally to deflect the focus put on the individual in question, which encircle them and constantly remind them of the eviction, a past period of their life.

⁸ Conceptualization in progress of new State shapes building new path of exit or entry for the Malian expelled

⁹ BECKER Howard (1963). *Outsiders; studies in the sociology of deviance*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.

The chance to have some cultural capital (provided with schooling for a long time in Mali and sometimes even to have been awarded a diploma in France) allows to these expelled to pass contribute or to look for an employment, often within NGO and more and more in associations, created in Mali since 2008, for the defense of the expelled and repulsed people. In March, 2011, we noted a new project of collaboration for the care of training this workforce, was set up between the Malian Employment Agency and the Center of information and management of the migrations (CIGEM) financed partially by France.

However, there are few are expelled Malians which follow these virtuous routes. It will be question now to exceed this visible minority, interfering in the shadow of the invisible expelled, another group created by the crossing of Malian borders.

1.b. The entry to a new underground

The majority¹⁰ of the expelled Malians have never returned to their village or to their family. Stigmatized by themselves as expelled, they have developed remarkable social strategies of avoidance and survival. Most of them have become ghosts, "ghosts of the shame" dixit most of them during interviews.

Which survival devices did they manage to use in order not to yield? What have these *ghosts of the shame* become?

➤ Setting up a strategy of elaborate survival : hiding the stigma with the help of transnational allies

Despite the degrading jobs and restricted revenue, these expelled gain an honorable place on the family chessboard when they are outside the border. Pride of the family, far from wanting to end this lifestyle (of their family) and risk to lose the symbolic capital which they have dearly acquired, the expelled prefer to hide themselves by entering a new underground. After living in France for years as undocumented, the expelled have become again clandestine within their own country, while waiting for another chance to leave it.

This secret life can be short-term depending on the time when their "allies" gather enough money to buy a new passport for the new adventure or to make a hypothetical request for a visa Type C on the passport of someone else who looks strangely similar to the expelled¹¹. Madame D. explained us how she spent 5.500 Euros to see her nephew, expelled, return to France. She was her moral and financial so-called "ally", without ever telling this to anyone else in the family. Unable to be discredited or discreditable¹² as long as they live in Mali, they

¹⁰ Results of my survey by questionnaire, within Expelled Malian Association, March-June 2008

¹¹ Strategy which is going to disappear, when Malian will be forced to have biometric passport. Mali experiments the biometric visa since 2005

¹² Term borrowed from Goffman (1963), *Stigmaté. Les usages sociaux du handicap*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit. A person who carries a stigma, who is not at once visible, is discreditable. His goal is to manage the information that is undisclosed. It is a constant threat of being identified and therefore stigmatized. When the stigma is revealed, the person is said : discredited. The discredited one assumes his stigma.

invent a new life and take a new name. It is like a chameleon adapting itself to multiple situations of interaction in Bamako. In order not to reveal their real identity, they avoid the places where they could be recognized or could meet a "cousin" or other members of their extended family. They live in another district in Bamako, sometimes in a "carré" parallel to that of their own family. They learn little by little progressively to manipulate their personal information and adopt appropriate characteristics. This mental gymnastics requires some know-how and a permanent effort affecting half of the personality when a hidden expelled has to begin working to join a new departure project, and especially when he accelerates the transformation process.

Among the most skillful of these tightrope walkers stand the expelled women who can manage well to be "invisible". Always fluent in French, they occupy discreet jobs as hairdressers or cleaning ladies in private wealthy shops or hotels.

These ghosts of the shame are particularly rational entrepreneurs. They estimate how much it costs if they reveal their stigma and opt for the dissimulation or even invisibility. Considered an indispensable resource, the invisibility is a result of the restricted but effective transnational capital, acquired after several years of secret life in France. However, for certain clandestine social skills, this resource is contrarily little reinvested. In general, the underground world within their own country is intensively lived by the expelled because, for them, it is effective only if it is temporary.

➤ **Becoming the shadow of themselves, even darker in madness**

There are a lot of expelled who are struck by the stigma of the shame, which overwhelms their family, and relive the expulsion in a continuous loop. The incomprehension gradually leaves space to the fear until it imprisons themselves inside the memories or even the madness. They pursue their life in exile in a kind of parallel dimension. "I am walking but I am not here. My head is over there." Said me an expelled.

This introspection sometimes brutally comes to an end when the family searches for the expelled, just like the phenomenon of the "children-wizards" occurring in Central Africa in the most precarious and, most often, polygamous Malian families, which I shall name the phenomenon of the "damned expelled". Returning home "empty-handed", the expelled are condemned to bring shame and especially misfortune to their family. The Pentecostal concept of the "ancestral curse" (which implies, according to Sandra Fanello¹³, that the consequence of sins committed by the former, falls again on their downward lineage) is manipulated here with a remarkable adeptness often by the cruel mothers.

2/ What is an expelled Malian of Africa?

¹³ FANELLO Sandra, *Les Aventuriers du pentecôtisme ghanéen : Nation, conversion et délivrance en Afrique de l'Ouest*, IRD-Karthala, coll. « Religions contemporaines », Paris: November 2006, p. 165

The expelled Malians of the African States constitute a particular category. Their path is disproportionate compared to those in Europe (even in France). However, they also represent a specificity in Mali. How do the African borders contribute to the expulsion of the Malians who distinguish themselves from the expelled Malians of Europe?

Neither shame, nor dishonor, nor stigmatization waits for Mr Siby, expelled from Angola and member of the Expelled Malian Association, in his return to the village or to Bamako in spite of the empty hands. "An expelled in Africa suffers more than those in France and any other places. Storekeepers died in their shops just because they did not want to go out. The conditions of detention are so archaic and inhuman that prisoners, decreased by the malnutrition, die from diseases mostly due to the lack of hygiene. This does not happen to the expelled Malians from Europe."

The Malian expelled from Africa is raised to the rank of alive legend, as a hero. For his big family, its return is rather a reassurance than an unspeakable general punishment stigmatized. Far from being struck by the stigma of expelled and to go up strategies of extinction and dissimulation towards their family and social network, these expelled of Africa acquire privileged symbolic capital. They pull certain prestige in front of surmounted tests. Indeed the way a Malian national crosses the border of his country creates singular sociological effects according to the nature of "the State of refusal". On the one hand the artificiality of the borders remains firmly fixed in the Malian *habitus*, on the other hand the African or West "States of refusal"¹⁴ manipulate the borders, using the eviction and repulsion with the intention to turn into the abstraction of the border in an object (reification). The Malian state has become after many years "the State of rebound", and does not want to become a new "State of refusal".

Conclusion

Process of a new crystallization in the Malian borders by the West?

The city of Kidal in the North opens on a space of 5.000 km of border without real obstacles apart from those drawn up by nature. This long, completely rectilinear border has in the past few months acquired a renewed interest from the Malian State on one hand, as well as the United States and the European Union, under the French impetus. This space near the Sahara is crossed by multiple flexible networks but is in perpetual reorganization, since this Malian space became a security priority zone for the EU, which wishes as in Morocco, to deploy FRONTEX there.

Is a new process of crystallization of one of 7 borders of Mali at work in the Sahel?

¹⁴ Conceptualization in progress of new State shapes building new path of exit or entry for the Malian expelled : "State of rebound", "State of refusal"

This crystallization comes with an effect of announcement on the means deployed to assure the stability of this Sahelian border. To see the border as a political instrument reveals how Mali tries to rationalize its internal sovereignty, with the objective to emancipate itself at best from the external wills of management of its borders, but also to dissipate this image, shared inside as outside, of "good careless pupil ", according to the IMF.

This elasticity of the Malian borders is challenged by: Western policies of visas with variable scales, violent border events (in Ivory Coast), the massive arrival of Malians from Libya..., all these events contribute today to justify the reaction of the Malian Head of State, who with the writing in the course of a text of law, seems to want to firm up and to re-appropriate its seven borders, which are transformed by the implementation of checkpoints customs officers financed by the European Union.

Mali lives what today what the Moroccan authorities lived in 2005 and what the countries of the Schengen area live at present. Indeed, Morocco had been forced to put more order in the management of its territory to contain the *exit* of the African migrants. In that case, the State began to play more and more the role of "gendarme / the police man" with Spain behind them, at least as collaborators to control the Strait of Gibraltar. "Mali is forced to do it", said the General Secretary of the Ministry of "Maliens de l'Extérieur", Mr. Mamady Traoré. This speech seems equivocal.

Are the borders of the European Union becoming confused with those of Sahel today?

By rationalizing their borders, Mali is protecting itself: but at the same time, is it locking in its people?