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Return migration as a win-win-win scenario? Visions of return among Senegalese migrants, the state of origin and receiving countries

Giulia Sinatti

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This article explores the topic of return migration as it is understood and practised by different actors who engage with this theme, albeit from different perspectives. Return migration is paraded in policy debates as a triple-win scenario, bringing advantages to receiving states, countries of origin and migrants. Yet this article reveals how return migration is understood differently by policymakers in Senegal and Europe and by the migrants targeted by their policies. Interpretations are based on conflicting underlying assumptions of what return is, its benefits and its relation to transnational movement. Inspired by the discursive paradigm in political studies, this article utilizes interpretive tools to examine the structures that support and give meaning to understandings of return among institutional actors and migrants. It concludes that new theorization is needed to grasp the full complexity of return migration as a phenomenon that is marked by different temporalities and aspirations.

Keywords: return migration; transnationalism; development; policy analysis; Senegal; Europe

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1. Introduction

Return migration has gained increasing attention on the global policy scene, where it is often paraded as a triple-win scenario. First, sending states are considered to benefit from returning resources and skills acquired abroad by migrants. Second, through temporary migration followed by return, receiving states are believed to profit from workforce renewal. Third, return migrants are seen as enjoying improved conditions in the country of origin achieved thanks to migration. In contrast to the prevailing discourse, however, this article shows that return migration is a highly contested issue. Driven by conflicting aims, origin and host governments and migrants attribute different meanings to return, ranging from permanent resettlement in the country of origin to temporary return within broader mobility trajectories. How government policies and the experiences of migrants reflect different conceptions of return, transnational movement and migration is an important topic of investigation that this article sets out to explore.

Return policies of receiving states have become objects of scholarly attention in debates on migration management, understood as an extension of border control through cooperation with countries of origin in order to regulate migration in ways that benefit all parties (Hollifield 2004; Martin, Abella, and Kuptsch 2005; Taylor 2005; Geiger and Pécoud 2010). Return is largely a tool for the removal of unwanted immigrants through forced and semi-voluntary return mechanisms. Policies developed by countries of origin towards their emigrant communities have also emerged as a topic of analysis (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Green 2005; Gamlen 2006; Ragazzi 2009). Origin-country governments reach out to their diasporas to ensure continuous ties with the homeland; however, their

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policies may encourage return in more symbolic or virtual terms than physical repatriation. Existing literature on policy negotiations confirms that origin and host countries are motivated by different interests (Lavenex and Kunz 2008; Chou 2009). Moreover, the return policies of receiving and origin countries may reflect (or diverge from) the aspirations and practices of migrants. Studies confronting policies and programmes for return migration with those they target uncover mismatches in understandings (van Houte and Davids 2008; Åkesson 2011; Boccagni 2011; Flahaux and Kabbanji 2013) and calls for research and theorization that can more systematically assess the agendas, meanings and expectations of return for these actors.

This article simultaneously analyses host and homeland policies for return migration and migrant perspectives. Senegal, a country that has invested significantly in articulating migration policy, is presented as a case study. The Senegalese government was among the first in Africa to acknowledge the importance of its diaspora and establish special institutions for that population, creating in 1993 the Ministry for the Senegalese of the Exterior (MSE). Emigration is an important asset to the country, with remittances accounting for approximately 10% of gross domestic product (World Bank 2010). Moreover, Senegal represents an important concern for the European Union (EU) and its member states due to its geographic position along irregular migratory routes from Africa to Europe. Many Senegalese live in France, Italy and Spain. Largely low-skilled people emigrating for economic reasons, the Senegalese typically engage in jobs requiring few qualifications. They often migrate alone and maintain regular contact with their country of origin, where they leave their families in the hope of returning (Riccio 2002; Sinatti 2011).

The analysis in the pages that follow is based on Senegalese and European policy documents and programme documentation from return migration initiatives identified through a mapping exercise. In-depth interviews were conducted with six Senegalese government and other officials and with fifty-nine Senegalese labour migrants returning from Italy and Spain.[11] The relatively small number of migrants interviewed may limit the representativeness of the sample. Nonetheless, field notes from several years of ethnographic work among Senegalese migrants backed the inclusion of a diversified range of return practices.

This article is organized in five distinct sections. Through a discussion of existing literature, the next section shows that there is little understanding about the benefits reaped by different actors from return or simply from migration, and it highlights the inadequacy of existing theorization. Interpretive policy analysis is also presented here as a useful approach to map 'the architecture of meaning underlying the formal categories', which always 'entail and reflect a set of ideas about their subject matter' (Yanow 2000, 48). The third section uncovers different meanings of return through an analysis of policies of the EU and the Senegalese government. The fourth section looks into the understandings of return, transnational mobility and migration held by Senegalese migrants. Finally, the last section offers some conclusions and sketches the broad lines of a framework that could more systematically assess how different return patterns lead to different outcomes for origin and host countries, as well as for migrants.

2. Return, transnational movement and development

Current theorization and research show that return migration is marked by different temporalities, aspirations and outcomes. Under the influence of the transnational

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approach to migration studies, latest developments in scholarly work challenge the previously held assumption that return corresponds to migrants' definitive resettlement in the country of origin. Multi-faceted understandings of return have emerged (e.g. circulating migrants and occasional, seasonal and temporary returnees), making it difficult to draw a clear line between return and other aspects of transnational movement (King 2000; Oxfeld and Long 2004).

Return has also been defined as arising out of different drivers. Cerase (1974) distinguished between the various motivations held by migrants at the time of return, proposing a typology that remains largely applicable to economic migrants. The category of return 'of failure' includes those who are unsuccessful in adapting to the context of immigration and resume the life they led prior to departure; return 'of conservatism' indicates those who remain in migration until they can return to improved conditions, which they evaluate on the basis of the values of their homeland society; return 'of innovation' indicates migrants with return aspirations that are qualitatively different from those held at the time of departure and who bring back new values and ideas; and return 'of retirement' indicates those going back at the end of their working lives. Whereas Cerase focused on *motivations* at the time of return, Gmelch (1980) and King (2000) proffer a distinction between migrants' *aspirations* at the moment of departure, when permanent resettlement in the country of origin may or may not have been intended.

Academics are concerned also with the outcomes of return migration. Literature on the migration and development nexus investigates the implications for countries of origin, as migrants may return with financial resources, skills and contacts. Awareness that return may be marked by different temporalities, nonetheless, complicates the relation between development and return and makes it difficult to differentiate between advantages deriving from return and those stemming simply from migration. As a result of migrants' transnational engagement, Ammassari and Black (2001, 16–17) conclude that it has become difficult to distinguish 'whether permanent return is a prerequisite for making transfers of financial, human, and social capital advantageous for the development of migrants' home countries' or whether migrants can 'contribute to such development without settling there for good'. According to some, confusion about the different benefits offered by permanent and temporary return or by migration has led to the overestimation of the development outcomes of return (King 2000). Even research paying explicit attention to return temporalities has reached little agreement regarding its impact. Asiedu (2005), for instance, finds that Ghanaian migrants make significant transfers of financial and other forms of capital that may promote development even on the occasion of temporary return visits. Others have found that regular return visits strongly facilitate longer-term return (Duval 2004).

In addition to the temporalities of return, development effects may differ according to return aspirations. Following Cerase, return of innovation holds the greatest potential to promote change in the country of origin. Building on this typology with research among returnees to Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, Tiemoko (2004) concludes that innovativeness and development potential may also be found among migrants returning under the influence of their families, presumed to match the category of conservative returnees. These returnees, in fact, made significant financial and cultural capital transfers to the country of origin during migration and, after return, maintained significant ties with their country of overseas residence. Cerase also highlighted that conservative returnees travel back to the country of origin throughout migration and are strongly inclined to remit and save. These

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findings are confirmed by Gmelch, who empirically shows that migrants with return intentions make more significant remittance transfers during migration.

This complex relationship between migration, return and development is well summarized by Papademetriou and Martin (1991). They indicate return as one of three factors (recruitment and remittances being the other two) affecting economic development in labour-exporting countries. Known as the 'three R's', their model suggests:

> Recruitment affects who emigrates, and thus impacts on employment and production. Remittances affect the living standards of migrant households, and thus the growth of communities and regions. Finally, returning migrants affect the quantity and quality of the work force. (Papademetriou and Martin 1991, x)

Effects on the homeland, therefore, ultimately depend on the profiles of who is recruited, who remits and who returns. Similarly, Portes (2009, 5) concludes that the relationship between migration and socio-economic development in sending countries requires a distinction between the human capital composition of different flows, their duration, their structural significance and their change potential.

This article does not aim to answer the riddle of the complex relations between permanent resettlement, transnational mobility and homeland development. Instead, it departs from this impasse to explore how public policies in Europe and Senegal engage with return. Specifically, the article looks at how understandings of return are rooted in actors' diverse interests and asks the following questions: What kind of return is envisaged (i.e. temporary or permanent)? Who or what should be returning? What are the benefits to be reaped from return? Answers are sought through reference to political theory's discursive paradigm. Inspired by social constructionist thought, this paradigm calls for an analysis of policies as embedded in a 'web of social meanings produced and reproduced through discursive practices. Politics and public policy are understood to take shape through socially interpreted understandings' (Fischer 2003, 13). This justifies a focus 'on the crucial role of language, discourse, rhetorical argument, and stories in framing both policy questions and the contextual contours of argumentation, particularly the ways normative presuppositions operate below the surface to structure basic policy definitions and understandings' (Fischer 2003, 14).

Specific research tools to apply a discursive approach in policy analysis are illustrated in the works of Yanow (1996, 2000; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011), who advances an 'interpretive' approach. She suggests analysing the ways in which actors in a policy situation (i.e. policymaking officials and the polity they target) are active constructors of policy and agency meanings. An interpretive approach takes into account the different positioning of the concerned actors (in this case, host and homeland policymakers and migrants), and how this affects the social and policy meanings of return.

3. Return migration: policy perspectives

Migration policies of the EU are dominated by an interest in curbing irregular migration through effective migration management. Return plays a prominent role, as illustrated in the European Commission's (EC) Global Approach to Migration:

> [Return is] a fundamental part of managing migration. Member States must be supported in designing and implementing voluntary return programmes and plans for enforced return, including joint flights for removal. Supporting Member States in obtaining the necessary

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> documentation for an immediate return and readmission of illegal migrants remains a priority. (EC 2006, 9)

Return is coupled with the terms 'removal' and 'readmission', and is a means for the turning back of undesired immigrants such as irregular stayers, rejected asylum seekers and people living in marginal conditions (Ghosh 2000; King 2000; Koser 2000). Implicit in this understanding is that the return of these migrants should be permanent. The current lexicon of governmental and intergovernmental agencies adopts a narrow definition of return that refers to leaving the territory of a destination country and that is 'euphemistically used as a synonym of readmission or expulsion' (Cassarino 2008, 97). Nonetheless, European authorities are aware that 'to broker a deal the EU needs to offer something in return. In their bilateral readmission negotiations Member States are increasingly offering also other forms of support and assistance to third countries to facilitate the conclusion of such agreements' (EC 2006, 9).

Often, the assistance offered to third countries takes the form of funding and support for cooperation programmes that enhance the positive roles played by migrants in homeland development, based on the assumption that improved conditions in the country of origin will reduce the desire to emigrate and curtail irregular migration. The position of the EC vis-à-vis return is further strengthened in the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility adopted in 2011, which tightens links between border controls, lower levels of irregular migration, and an effective return policy on the one hand, and agreements facilitating visas for demand-driven legal migration on the other hand (EC 2011). For countries like Italy, Spain and France, readmission agreements are at the heart of European bilateral cooperation with African countries, confirming that 'while there has been much talk of improving economic and security conditions in source countries… so far the emphasis has been on policies aimed at curbing immigration at the destination end' (Nyberg-Sørensen, van Hear, and Engberg-Pedersen 2002, 5).

This is reflected in the cooperation agreement signed by the EU with the Republic of Senegal for 2008–13, in which €288 million was allocated to the country for macroeconomic support and sector policies, and €9.8 million for unforeseen urgent aid. The agreement contains repeated references to Senegal as a significant country of migrant origin and transit (RS and EC 2007), confirming Europe's preoccupation with immigrant entry. At the time of signing this agreement, initial discussions had been under way between the EU and Senegal to define a mobility partnership dedicated to migration issues. When negotiations were subsequently halted, analysts attributed this to a perception – on the part of the Senegalese government – that the proposed contents did not reflect its own (Chou and Gibert 2012). Mobility partnerships that were later finalized with other countries (Armenia, Cape Verde, Georgia and Moldova) all included agreements for the readmission of undesired migrants alongside measures facilitating visas for immigrant entry on the basis of labour market demand, preferably on a temporary basis. This confirms that the EU's position towards return and transnational mobility is coupled with ambitions of permanent return or controlled movement.

The priorities of the Senegalese government with respect to return are outlined in a sector policy on migration that was adopted by the MSE in 2006. The document places return within a concern for migration at large as an issue that 'must be addressed along three forms of movement: departure, overseas sojourn, and voluntary or forced return' and that 'is not limited to irregular migrants' (MSE 2006, 1).

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The policy emphasizes the voluntary return of working-age and retired migrants lawfully residing abroad. The document acknowledges that most Senegalese migrants are low-skilled, working-age men who emigrated alone, and that – given the gap in conditions they enjoy abroad compared to those available in Senegal – only a small number of high-skilled Senegalese migrants return. Under the broader aim to 'better incorporate emigration as a development factor' (MSE 2006, 17), the document indicates a number of specific policy objectives, which include the protection and the promotion of migrants. Protection is relevant in the case of forced permanent return, when the policy delegates to third parties the responsibility to respect the human rights of deported individuals. Protection also includes agreements with destination countries for the portability of social security rights such as pensions, which are advocated to facilitate return for the retired.

The most significant implications for return migration, however, fall under the objective of promotion. The policy states the need to support a transition from 'subsistence emigration' to an 'emigration of accumulation' (MSE 2006, 29–31). This recalls the contents of Senegal's wider development policy, which distinguishes between 'poverty reduction' and 'economic growth' and states a need to emphasize the latter.[2] Migration should contribute to this through 'the development of human resources and the capacity to accumulate resources that can favour productive investment in the country' (MSE 2006, 20). On the one hand, the sector policy acknowledges that significant inflows of remittances constitute a lifeline for many Senegalese households and contribute significantly to poverty reduction. On the other hand, it suggests that the use of remittances for consumption purposes should be reduced in favour of savings and productive investment.

In this sense, migration can contribute to the economic growth advocated in Senegal's development policy through a selective approach towards an elite segment of its migrant population. Rooted in this policy, in fact, governmental initiatives favour the return of high-skilled migrants on fixed-term assignments and promise information and assistance to a restricted number of aspiring migrant investors with promising ideas. Through these initiatives, which are outlined in greater detail in the following section, the Senegalese government demonstrates awareness that return can be beneficial to the country depending upon who returns and with what skills, savings and professional capital that could be useful for the establishment of new enterprises (Ammassari and Black 2001). Encouraging the return of a small portion of migrants with sought-after skills and attracting diaspora investment in sectors identified as relevant for national economic growth while still reaping the benefits of remittances sent by the majority of other emigrants offers Senegal the best of both worlds.

Senegalese policies towards return not only adopt a strongly elitist stance, but also refuse a distinction between different temporalities of return, favouring mobility over permanent resettlement. In its migration policy, the Senegalese government reveals a notion of return that focuses on attracting migrants' resources and skills rather than on the return of migrants themselves. Senegal deliberately avoids a distinction between permanent or temporary return and migration, indicating that both 'Senegalese migrants who are living regularly overseas and candidates for voluntary return' can be beneficial to the country's development (MSE 2006, 14), and that the latter should be based on an 'emigration of mobility' (MSE 2006, 20). Permanent return, in short, is not seen as a prerequisite for transfers of human, social and financial capital.

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Some implicit assumptions underlie the perspective of Senegalese authorities on return. First, Senegalese migrants are considered to have an explicit '*will* to play a positive role in the economic development of their country of origin' (MSE 2006, 14, emphasis added). Second, Senegalese policy assumes that development may result from migration while underestimating its potential role as a precondition for return. The policy indicates migrants' lack of information about promising investment sectors and necessary administrative dealings as major obstacles preventing investment. It thus overlooks factors that are beyond migrants' control, for instance infrastructural impediments to investment. Yet 'structural conditions have a fundamental impact on individual migrants' abilities to support development', a perspective that is 'often left out of contemporary policies' (Åkesson 2011, 61). The local development context, in fact, largely determines whether migration and remittances allow people to withdraw from local economic activity or to save and invest in it (de Haas 2005). According to Oxfeld and Long (2004, 14), '[s]tate policies are critical to determining whether a return is only imagined or becomes physically possible and under what conditions. States construct the legal, social and political parameters and interpretations of return'.

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4. Return to Senegal: migrant perspectives

Return is not only a concern for policymakers in Europe and Senegal, but also a private affair with implications for migrants and their families. In line with the 'ethnography of return' advocated by Oxfeld and Long (2004), policy meanings should be compared with emic accounts of return among those directly affected. An understanding of return requires attention to 'people's own systems of meaning and experiences' in order to 'discern the particular human consequences… in everyday lives and actions' (Oxfeld and Long 2004, 3). In particular, this section is concerned with migrants' own understandings of return, development and transnational movement as issues that have been largely overlooked by the literature so far (Bakewell 2008; Raghuram 2009; Sinatti 2011).

Return occupies an important position in the migratory projects of most Senegalese. Leaving the home country for economic reasons, they aspire through overseas work to accumulate resources that will improve the livelihoods of their families in the short term, and in the longer term allow them to return to better living conditions. In view of return, most Senegalese cultivate strong transnational ties throughout migration. The Senegalese correspond to the aspiring returnees who always intended migration to be temporary in Gmelch (1980) and King's (2000) categorizations. They indicate return itself as the reason that motivates departure (Sinatti 2011, 158). As for other West African migrants (Carling and Åkesson 2009), return for the Senegalese ideally marks the closure of the migration cycle and is coupled with permanent resettlement aspirations. This emerges from the words of migrants at different stages of their return plan:

> I always think one day of going back home *for good* to Senegal. (migrant, in Senegal for two years before re-migrating)
> If things go well as I hope, in a few years I can stay in Senegal *forever*. (returnee, in Senegal for five years)

While the first of these interviewees still engages in migration, the second spends most of his time in Senegal to follow a self-initiated business. In interviews, migrants associate return with physical presence in the country of origin, rather than with the mere

repatriation of resources and skills as reflected in Senegalese policies. For most, investment is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable permanent return, not a goal in itself. Housing constitutes an important spending priority, to which a governmental programme aims at responding through the promotion of access to land for Senegalese expatriates. New building plots have been allocated for the development of *cités de la diaspora*, where exclusive villas are being constructed for migrants who must organize in real estate development cooperatives. However, most migrants prefer investing individually in neighbourhoods where they have family connections, building a house or renovating an existing family property on a smaller budget and often carrying out the work in stages as and when their earnings allow. Alongside investments in the housing sector, migrants are aware that permanent return most importantly requires securing a sustainable source of income:

> One needs a job; one has to work in order to live in Senegal. (returnee, in Senegal for one year)

In the absence of alternatives in the Senegalese labour market, many turn to self-employment, hoping to establish a small enterprise while they are still economically active:

> For me going back to Senegal means having obtained a positive result from my migration experience. I don't think a migrant who stays overseas until retirement can say to have had a positive result. A positive result is managing to go back as soon as possible, and managing to spend part of your [active] life in your own country. (returnee, in Senegal for six years)

Limited savings, the lack of skills or the mismatch of skills with local needs, and poor opportunities offered by markets at home mean that, with few exceptions, migrants invest in businesses that are scarcely innovative and in sectors that are largely congested, particularly commerce:

> Most migrants think that if they can accumulate the money they will set up a bakery, or a small shop selling rice, oil and onions. This does not help the country to develop: it is already full of petty traders. One Senegalese returned and started producing T-shirts, for instance for local soccer teams. This is the right direction. But selling food or importing used goods just fills the country with other people's waste. (official, assisted return programme)

The personal development ambitions of migrants lead to investments that are distant from the aspirations of economic growth indicated in Senegalese government policy. Real estate investments and migrant businesses may contribute to upgrading disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods or villages, generate demand for the services of local craftsmanship (Sinatti 2009a), or bring local benefits through multiplier effects, but their overall contribution to national development is limited. In the attempt to attract investment projects with potential for economic growth, a one-stop shop hosted by the *Agence Nationale Chargée de la Promotion de l'Investissement et des Grands Travaux* (APIX) provides information and offers tax breaks to migrants similar to those reserved for foreign investors. Only a small minority of migrants with the ability to mobilize significant resources, however, is eligible for this governmental scheme. Another governmental initiative, the Support Fund for the Investments of Overseas Senegalese (FAISE), explicitly targets migrant beneficiaries. In order to qualify, investors must target

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sectors other than commerce, transport or housing; provide a feasibility study; and show capacity to repay the loan received within five years. Only approximately thirty entrepreneurial projects that meet these requirements are granted support each year, confirming that governmental incentives provided through return programmes generally have a negligible impact (Black, King, and Litchfield 2003, 10). In an interview, an official in charge of a programme offering assistance to migrant entrepreneurs confirms that: 'Those who make it in Senegal and set up businesses that really thrive are often already successful entrepreneurs abroad. It is rare to see someone tied to a blue-collar job achieve the same level of success.'

Aside from its repercussions for development, economic investment in the origin country also has implications for the temporal dimension of return. During migration, temporary return helps revitalize migrants' linkages with homeland communities and is important in maintaining relationships with family and friends. Return visits, in particular, are accompanied by the remittance of substantial savings that immediately stimulate local expenditure (Asiedu 2005) and facilitate identifying prospective investments or starting up new businesses (Ammassari and Black 2001; Black and King 2004). These forms of temporary return may, however, constrain the establishment of an economic activity, as most interviewees indicate that longer-term presence is necessary for any investment to fully take off:

> It is rare to see someone investing in Senegal from abroad and succeeding. It is best to be physically there in person. (returnee, in Senegal for seven years)

Physical presence to closely follow one's business requires returning to Senegal with a longer-term perspective. Nonetheless, in many cases such a decision still does not mark the accomplishment of permanent return. Particularly for traders selling imported goods, halting transnational mobility is not possible as journeys to Europe are essential to cultivate professional capital overseas and to secure business deals. These journeys are perceived as temporary business trips, rather than as migration. Only a minority of migrants considers these journeys a deliberate and welcomed choice. In most cases, they are experienced as a mandatory compromise to make return sustainable.

The diversity of these two attitudes towards transnational mobility is evident in the stories of Gallaye and Goumba. With no previous experience or training in this sector, Gallaye established an enterprise selling imported marble and tiles in Senegal after five years of residence in Italy. The business idea developed out of his friendship with an Italian businessman in this trade, which allowed him to establish commercial relations with trusted producers overseas. Gallaye travels every year from Senegal to Europe, where he meets with business partners and visits friends in Italy, Spain and France. He describes these trips as a 'mouthful of fresh air', a way to escape from the daily difficulties in Senegal of running a business that gives formal employment to a dozen people.

Goumba, having worked as a mechanic in Senegal and thanks to almost two decades of labour abroad, set up a store selling second-hand vehicle parts in Dakar. His business relies on regular departures to renew his stock, paying personal visits to his broad network of Italian automobile scrapyard suppliers.

Whereas Gallaye travels to Europe more out of his own desire than to guarantee the success of his business, Goumba would be happy to cease his trips. A parallel can be drawn between Gallaye's motivations for transnational mobility after return and the

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reasons driving Cerase's innovative migrants to return to the country of origin. Similarly, Goumba's post-return mobility matches that of conservative returnees and is functional to the survival of his business. He well fits the predominant profile of transnational traders, who are largely 'locked in mobility' as a compromise 'between the benefits offered by staying in migration and sustainable permanent return' (Sinatti 2011, 164).

> I know of many who have returned, but it is never a definitive return because their economic activity depends on travelling to Europe regularly to buy goods. Many think of doing this in order to go back forever, but it is not sustainable as they sell their merchandise at credit and then struggle to cash in on what is owed to them. Most of them have to travel back to Europe anyway to renew their residency, so they come, work for a few months in paid employment, and then buy new supplies to go back again. (returnee, in Senegal for twelve years)

Also in Cape Verde, the mobility associated with transnational trade is experienced by those who engage in this business as 'a strategy for avoiding "emigration"' (Carling and Åkesson 2009, 133). Transnational trade, in fact, allows for refraining from a long-term commitment to paid employment overseas. Only a small portion of Senegalese migrants, however, succeeds in returning to the origin country with a sustainable business (Mezger and Beauchemin 2010). Uncertainties associated with economic and social reinsertion in the country of origin cause many resettlement efforts to fail. In such circumstances, migrants may choose re-emigration as a means to gather resources and support a future new business attempt in the homeland.

The cases illustrated above demonstrate that, although migrants' predominant aspiration is definitive return, transnational mobility (before and after return) is functional to the achievement of personal development goals and is thus key in making return sustainable (Black and King 2004, 80–81). Temporary visits from a country of residence, as well as short-term business trips or longer-term re-emigration from the country of origin after attempted permanent resettlement, make the possibility to freely define one's movement fundamental. Obtaining and renewing legal residency status overseas is a necessity for migrants, a reality that strongly contrasts with the permanent repatriation orientation expressed in EU policies. Castles (2004) finds that many return migration programmes worldwide fail because they do not offer the option of re-emigration. This finding is corroborated by the conclusions of recent reports, which underline that the inability to freely control the timing of one's return – as in the case of forced returnees and of migrants whose movement is rigidly framed in temporary migration programmes – negatively affects the capacity to save resources for consistent investment in Senegal (Sinatti 2009b; Flahaux and Kabbanji 2013).

5. Conclusion

This article has compared the policy perspectives of Senegal and the EU on return migration with the experiences of migrants. Against global discourses suggesting the triple-win nature of return, a multi-vocal scenario reveals actors' dissimilar understanding of the meaning of return. The policies of origin and host countries are driven by conflicting aims and serve the interests of states before addressing those of migrants. A mismatch between the conceptualization of return 'from above' and 'from below' means that policies fail to fully reflect the experiences of migration as it is lived and practised by migrants themselves.

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European policymakers hold a restrictive understanding of return that is conditioned by migration management aspirations. Return is largely reduced to the definitive removal of unwanted migrants through forced or semi-voluntary return and is accompanied by demand-driven, labour-migration ideals and a wish to control the entrance and exit of desired migrants. The support for voluntary return offered by the EU to origin countries is primarily a means to ensure collaboration on readmission agreements. Although permanent resettlement cannot be enforced in the case of voluntarily returning migrants, the perspective of northern governments largely sees return as closing the migration cycle. Continued transnational mobility or re-emigration after return are seen 'as indicating a failure of the sustainability of return', whereas 'an alternative view would suggest that in order for their return to be sustainable, returnees need to retain continued access to the wider international professional and social world in which they have worked and lived' (Black and King 2004, 80). Such policies suffer from a sedentary bias (Bakewell 2008), as they fail to acknowledge that mobility may be desirable for migrants and that the advantages of freely deciding about one's movement fade when efforts to control movement through restrictive notions of return are introduced. Moreover, underlying European institutional actors' broader willingness to promote the development effects of migration is the flawed implicit assumption that more development in the homeland will encourage more migrants to return and refrain from further mobility, as well as discourage the departure of new migrants (de Haas 2007).

As a country of origin, Senegal has a distinctive attitude towards return that differs from that of European institutions. While the latter see return and repatriation as successful closures of the migration cycle, '[r]eturn is not necessarily promoted by home governments who may have a more direct interest in continuing flows of remittances than in incorporating returnees in the local labour market' (Nyberg-Sørensen, van Hear, and Engberg-Pedersen 2002, 12). Senegal's policy is guided by national development priorities. Maximizing the country's benefits and repatriating resources to reduce poverty and promote economic growth may contrast with migrants' ambitions to promote private advancement and personal well-being. This confirms that origin-country governments 'struggle to find the right balance between serving their own national interests and meeting the needs and demands of their overseas communities' (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003, 210). Return migration brings benefits to Senegal, whether it is permanent, temporary, circular or virtual in nature, on the basis of the specific profiles of migrants. On the one hand, targeted return incentives address a minority of migrants with outstanding potential to impact the country's economic growth. On the other hand, Senegalese policy also aims to reap immediate poverty reduction benefits from mass migration and transnational mobility. Migration and temporary return visits are opportunities for the transfer of significant resources, including remittances, savings, contacts and knowledge that may support new investments. Permanent return, instead, may work to Senegal's disadvantage when it is not sufficiently prepared for – after forced return or failed voluntary resettlement, for example. Continued transnational mobility allows the country to benefit at least from 'consumption migration' if not from 'migration of accumulation'. Because the advantages of return differ significantly on a case-to-case basis, it is in the country's interest to favour freedom of movement and leave the options of permanent repatriation and transnational movement open for migrants.

Moved by conflicting sovereign interests, sending and receiving countries do have a shared objective in the migration management agenda. Countries of origin and destination

both aim at 'introducing regulatory mechanisms buttressing their position as legitimate managers of the mobility of their nationals and foreigners' (Cassarino 2008, 95), which creates a chasm between their approaches to return and those of migrants. Migrants today enjoy increased possibilities to travel while maintaining relationships despite physical distance. However, they also deal with greater uncertainty about their livelihoods. Migrants' primary aim is personal advancement for themselves and their families. These private aspirations prevail over the concerns of their origin countries for national development and over those of their host countries for the ways in which migration can respond to workforce shortages and contribute to economic production. Although permanent return is the main aspiration of most Senegalese migrants, concrete return practices are difficult to frame in time and space. Return most often does not close the migration cycle, but comes with a shift in the way in which transnational mobility is understood and experienced by migrants. Mobility before and after attempted return is functional in different ways to the pursuit of personal advancement, and a distinction between the two is essential to make sense of otherwise complex mobilities.

Triple-win discourses about return oversimplify the meaning of this term and use it in pursuit of broader political agendas. Interpretive tools help uncover underlying implications and implicit interests, revealing the shifting meanings of return among receiving and origin countries and the addressees of their policies. The considerations outlined above highlight the limitations of current frameworks in understanding return migration and in capturing at once different spatial and temporal practices and the reasons behind them. Migrant mobility, settlement and resettlement need to be encompassed in a unitary framework that can distinguish between, among other things, permanent settlement in a country of residence; transnational mobility from overseas; permanent resettlement in the country of origin; transnational mobility from the country of origin; and re-emigration. These different temporal and spatial practices, in turn, are associated with different motivations, which are also important to grasp. This calls for an extension of Cerase's typology of return 'of failure', 'of conservatism', 'of innovation' and 'of retirement' with categories that explain migrant movement also in the opposite direction. Migrants, in fact, may engage in transnational mobility from the country of origin for similar reasons, for instance when reacting to the 'failure' of attempted permanent resettlement through re-emigration, when engaging in transnational mobility to ensure the 'conservation' of a business investment, or when they show an 'innovative' spirit and thrive in going back and forth to make the best of both worlds.

The analysis in the previous pages has contributed to revealing some of the politics of meaning behind global discourses on return migration, but unanswered questions remain that might be explored through further research. In particular, deeper insight is needed into the interests of states, specifically with respect to how the priorities and aims of various departments or institutions at the national and local level may differ within the same government. Moreover, this article has not explored the important role played by non-migrants, who are directly affected by migrants' decisions to stay or to leave, in shaping understandings of return in homeland societies at large.

This article demonstrates that understanding the linkages between development, return and transnational movement is a complex endeavour. This confirms the statement made over a decade ago that 'while empirical studies on return migration have started to accumulate, theoretical approaches and models to study return migration and its development implications are still lacking' (Ammassari and Black 2001, 12). Some broad

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lines for a theoretical framework that could unpack the relationship between the different temporalities, aspirations and outcomes of return have emerged from the findings of this article. In particular, better analytical distinction between transnational mobility before and after attempted resettlement in the country of origin would allow greater insight into the distinctions and overlap between different classifications of return offered by current literature. This would pave the way for more systematic research on how mobility practices that differ along temporal and spatial lines respond to different migrant aspirations and generate development outcomes, depending on the resources that each migrant carries.

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Notes

1. Data were collected in different periods between 2004 and 2012. Data on return migration policies and programmes were collected in 2011 and 2012. These were integrated with data from previous ethnographic fieldwork on the mobility patterns of labour migrants and on post-return reintegration within temporary migration schemes (undertaken between 2004 and 2009). Follow-up interviews with some earlier migrant respondents ensured longitudinal insight into the outcomes of their return. Interviews were conducted either by the author or with the aid of research assistants.
2. The 'Strategy Document for Growth and Poverty Reduction' was adopted by the Republic of Senegal in 2006 and replaced an earlier document with a focus only on poverty reduction.

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