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# Return migration, entrepreneurship and development: Contrasting the economic growth perspective of Senegal's diaspora policy through a migrant-centred approach

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the prominence of 'migration' as a policy domain in many African countries has shifted from labour-export policies to so-called 'diaspora policies'. In these policies, migration is emphasised as a key instrument to stimulate development, particularly through return to the homeland and migrant entrepreneurship. Despite much attention accorded to migrants' agency and affiliated cultural aspects in the 'migration and development nexus' debate, practices of return migration policy suffer from an inconsistency problem. The intention to promote national development is restricted by conceptual boundaries that define 'return migration' as a uni-directional flow from countries of immigration to countries of origin, and that reduce 'development' to its economic dimension. Acknowledging that migration and development have been long recognised in the scholarly literature as multi-faceted phenomena, this article exposes this inconsistency problem through ethnographic research among return businessmen in Senegal, whose experiences are advocated in diaspora policy as ideal returnees. I show how their practices are rooted in transnational relationships with the former country of immigration and, by implication, are built on bi-directional rather than uni-directional flows. Their motivations to return and invest depend on the sustainability of such relationships. I further illustrate that, by cultivating transnational linkages, initiating innovation and setting new examples, return businessmen bring implications for development well beyond economic growth as the core interest of diaspora policy. I conclude that the framing of development as a goal of diaspora policy in economic terms neglects what return migrants themselves value as important development objectives and outcomes.


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For nearly two decades, scholars have documented growing policy interest towards diasporas in countries of migrant origin, in Africa and elsewhere (Levitt & De la Dehesa 2003; Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Turner & Kleist 2013; Ho, Hickey & Yeoh 2015). So-called

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'diaspora policies' devise various tools through which migrants' linkages with the homeland may be upheld, for instance through overseas voting rights, facilitating remittances and investment, or cultural initiatives for second generation migrants abroad to cultivate their roots. Openly promoting the return of overseas nationals is often a key element in these diaspora policies (Cohen 2009; Tsuda 2010; Boccagni 2011; Ho 2011; Åkesson & Eriksson-Baaz 2015). Most of the scholarly literature analysing return through state-driven diaspora policies takes a critical stance, suggesting that these are highly instrumental, dominated by state interest and targeting the return of selected migrant resources and skills, often in the hope of attracting entrepreneurial investment (Murphy 2002; Cohen 2009; Boccagni 2011; Sinatti 2015a). Recent scholarship, however, invites looking beyond diaspora policies as state-driven affairs and including attention for other actors, particularly migrants (Ho, et al 2015; Erdal 2016). Not surprisingly, available empirical research already points to mismatches between understandings and expectations of return and investment among migrants and in policy, especially in Africa (Åkesson 2011; Flahaux & Kabbanji 2013; Kleist 2013; Sinatti 2015b). This article unpacks the complexities of this mismatch foregrounding the lived experiences and practices of return migrant entrepreneurs in Senegal against the backdrop of the country's diaspora policy. Ethnographic insight into the stories of successful returnee business-owners reveals the richness of return, entrepreneurship and development and calls for a holistic understanding of how they may be interconnected.

Senegal's longstanding history of policy engagement with its diaspora is an exemplary case. The country's experience in developing diaspora policies – setting up dedicated institutional bodies and establishing diaspora return programmes since the 1970s – has earned it the reputation of a forerunner. When international attention soared – from the late 1990s and early 2000s – on the linkages between migration and development, Senegal was poised for action in this field. At the time of writing, several programmes supporting diaspora return and entrepreneurial investment have been set up and are run by Senegalese authorities, independently or with the collaboration of countries of migrant destination.<sup>1</sup>

In earlier work (Sinatti 2015b), I have shown that these programmes and the diaspora policy underlying them contain two important misconceptions. Here, I argue that – apart from being reductionist from an economic point of view – both misconceptions also overlook advancements in academic work about the migration and development nexus. The first misconception is that, whilst abroad, migrants automatically acquire useful resources for the homeland. This implies that resources flow from North to South (Sinatti 2015b). Yet, the literature provides ample empirical evidence that resources travel both ways in transnational networks and that many migrants sustain significant transnational ties with the former country of immigration even after return. The second misconception emphasises the role of *financial* resources in promoting *economic* development. Senegal's official diaspora policy documents profile the ideal migrant returnee as 'resourceful, experienced, eager to initiate innovative and profitable enterprises that will allow new economic sectors to boom' (Sinatti 2015b: 90).<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, the selection criteria for participation in diaspora entrepreneurship support programmes are designed to single out 'super-entrepreneurs' (Naudé, Siegel & Marchand 2017): returnees with investment projects of a certain standing and in economic sectors identified as strategic for national economic growth.

These two misconceptions sit uncomfortably in scholarly debates about the migration and development nexus, which have long recognised the multifaceted character of both phenomena and urged to put migrants' agency at the centre of efforts to understand them (Raghuram 2009). As I discuss in the next section, transnational approaches to migration and capabilities approaches to development have particularly contributed to an actor-centred focus that understands the nexus between migration and development beyond mere economic transfers or economic growth.

Building on these debates about the migration and development nexus, I provide insight into migrant perspectives on return, entrepreneurship and development that contrast prevailing expectations contained in diaspora policy. I support my argument through in-depth qualitative interviews with, and ethnographic observations of, 60 migrants who have established businesses in Senegal upon their return.<sup>3</sup> My analysis is further reinforced by earlier ethnographic research on Senegalese (return) migration that I have conducted since the mid-1990s. This work also included an analysis of expectations inscribed in the diaspora policy framework, as articulated through the voices of returnees (Sinatti 2015a & 2015b). From this data, I select and illustrate the stories of a relatively small number of successful return businessmen. Having returned for at least one year, all had formally established economically thriving or promising businesses that also gave employment to others. Far from being representative of the average Senegalese returnee, the focus on these outlier cases is deliberate, as they closely match the ideal figure outlined in homeland return migration policy. Several of them had, in fact, applied for or obtained financial and administrative support for return migrant investors. The stories of these return businessmen, their perspectives on what motivated them to return, what they have achieved through their investments and their aspirations for the future testify to a much more complex picture than diaspora policy expectations about return, investment and economic growth.

This article is organised as follows. I begin with an overview of literature on the (return) migration and development nexus, showing that it has increasingly underscored the importance of non-economic aspects of return migration and of an actor-centred focus. I then review, in particular, the contribution of transnational and human development approaches to this discussion. I show that, combining both approaches, the outcomes of transnational linkages and migration are understood as enlarging not only the resources available to people, but also their choices of what they can do with the resources they possess.<sup>4</sup> This is followed with ethnographic insight into the stories of return migrant entrepreneurs, detailing their own lived experiences. I then go on to explore their decision to return, arguing that a focus on capabilities facilitates looking beyond economic motivations for return. I illustrate the significance, in return businesses, of post-return transnational relations and practices, suggesting that these bi-directional exchanges broaden the choices available to migrants. In the penultimate section, I look at returnees' own understandings of what, as business owners, they contribute to Senegal. I reveal how, in their own perceptions, they see themselves as enhancing the capabilities of other people around them. Finally, a concluding section suggests that, by expanding their own and other people's capabilities, the experiences of the return migrant entrepreneurs analysed in this article display a richness that diaspora return policies fail to grasp.

## Looking beyond economic returns through transnationalism and human development

Ever since the 1950s, the relationship between migration and development has been analysed with alternating optimistic and pessimistic views (De Haas 2010). Neo-classical and developmentalist optimism of the 1950s and 1960s saw migration as a form of optimal allocation of production factors that promotes development; this view was replaced by neo-Marxist pessimism in the 1970s and 1980s, when migration was mainly conceived as a flight from misery that increases inequalities and underdevelopment (De Haas 2010). Extending these approaches to return migration, the latter was seen, respectively, as bringing back useful resources for development or as the sign of economic failure further affecting already underprivileged countries. By the 1990s, the New Economics of Labour Migration replaced the focus on individuals that had characterised neo-classical economics with a focus on households. Return was then interpreted as the successful achievement of a calculated goal in which migration was a strategy to diversify risk and sources of income, ultimately leading to poverty reduction (Black & King 2004; Cassarino 2004; Black & Castaldo 2009). In the interpretations outlined so far, an economic focus predominates.

In recent decades, discussions about the migration-development nexus have received a strong new momentum both in policy and scholarly debates. Since the early 2000s, the literature has moved away from a prevalently economic focus on the development repercussions of migration to consider social and cultural dynamics and the perspectives of the people involved. Recent literature on return migration, in particular, emphasises the need to move beyond the parameter of economic flows, to pay attention to circuits of transfer involving human, social and cultural resources and skills. Understanding the significance of different kinds of flows allows to break through the binary opposition between neo-classical optimism and neo-Marxist pessimism, and thereby recognise that interactions between (return) migration and development are complex and heterogeneous.

Transnational approaches to migration studies have contributed significantly to introducing a multi-faceted understanding of migration and of its outcomes. Highlighting how individuals and communities forge linkages across borders and hold simultaneous commitments in more than one society, transnational theory uncovered the limitations of a solely economic focus on labour migration. Peggy Levitt's (1998) notion of social remittances particularly exposed how – through active and simultaneous engagement across countries – migrants initiate diverse and multi-directional flows of capital, through which they contribute to the formation and constant transformation of transnational social fields (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004).

A transnational approach allows capturing that migrants may be geographically mobile and sustain transnational contacts before and after return, and that return is set in particular social, cultural and political environments (Sinatti 2011; Carling & Erdal 2014). Transnationalism has offered an important basis for scholarship on return migration to look beyond economic dimensions and to highlight the significance of other transnational transfers in shaping return. Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2004), for instance, coined the expression 'return preparedness' to indicate migrants' ability to mobilise (not only economic) resources in view of or after return. Richmond Tiemoko (2004) showed that the family plays a key role in reintegration, influencing the impact of return migration on

economic but also social change in West Africa. Various contributors to an edited volume on return and development in Africa confirm the importance of social capital: supported by country-based evidence on migrant entrepreneurship in Burundi (Sagmo 2015), Cape Verde (Åkesson 2015), the Democratic Republic of Congo (Eriksson-Baaz 2015), and Senegal (Sinatti 2015b), they claim that social networks abroad and back home shape migrants' return paths. Empirical research on return and entrepreneurship has also underscored migrants' ability to mobilise work experience (Wahba & Zenou 2012; Lacombe & Cloquell 2017). In short, transnationalism has uncovered the significance of non-economic transfers mobilised in return migration.

Alongside transnational approaches to migration studies, development studies have also seen the emergence of approaches that look beyond development as a mere economic affair. Rather than focus only on peoples' economic well-being, human development, in particular, links development to people's capabilities. These are defined as substantive freedoms they possess and can act upon 'to achieve outcomes that they value and have reason to value' (Sen 1999: 291). A growing body of literature on the migration and development nexus adopts a human development approach (De Haas & Rodríguez 2010; Gasper & Truong 2010; Wright 2012; Preibisch, Dodd & Su 2016). Capabilities highlight 'the intrinsic importance of human freedoms as an objective of development, which has to be clearly distinguished from the instrumental effectiveness of such freedoms to contribute to economic progress' (De Haas & Rodríguez 2010: 178), as for instance defined in diaspora policies. Following this approach, (return) migration is first of all the enactment of one of people's fundamental capabilities: the capability to be mobile (Nussbaum 2006). Furthermore, 'individual freedoms acquired through individual [return] migration may lead to the acquisition of new capabilities that increase collective social, political and economic freedoms for those both at origin and at destination' (Wright 2012: 26, citing De Haas & Rodríguez 2010). Human development approaches allow appreciating that return migrants are much more than rational economic investors and that their entrepreneurial projects are embedded in (transnational) social fields and moral economies that shape migrants' own capabilities, those of other members of society around them, and the multi-dimensional outcomes of their investments.

Just as the field of migration studies has recognised that transnational connections and social remittances promote processes of social change, so too the field of human development studies has underlined how migration is an enactment of people's capabilities that, in turn, can expand the capabilities of others. In other words, both fields call for a people-centred focus. Both also call for attention to people's values and how, through social remittances and interactions, they are shaped by, and shape trajectories of social change.

This article combines insights from transnational and human development approaches to the migration and development nexus and applies them to the stories of return migrant entrepreneurs in Senegal. As I illustrate in the pages that follow, their narratives question the taken-for-granted centrality of economic aspects and emphasise how capability expansion is crucial to the development outcomes of return. Through insight into the perspectives of those very migrants who are the privileged target of Senegalese return migration policy, I show how they understand their businesses as contributing to a new Senegal, beyond economic success.

## **Migrant perspectives on return and investment beyond economic success**

A people-centred focus allows appreciating that return migration and entrepreneurial investment are about much more than just the pursuit of economic goals. Respondents often conveyed this message in interviews and informal conversations. In accounts of their decision to return and invest, many indeed referred to economic considerations, but they also showed the sense of empowerment they derived from transforming their capability to be mobile into a deliberate return choice. In this section, and in the rest of this article, I draw extensively on the stories of and interviews with migrants, three of whom I introduce more extensively, as emblematic cases to illustrate my arguments.

Thierno, Youssou and Babacar<sup>5</sup> are all three return migrants in their 30s or 40s who have set up successful business enterprises in Senegal after their return. When he is not busying himself producing or selling ice-cream in his shop in the tourist city of Saly, Thierno serves clients from a mobile ice-cream van or replenishes with fresh stock restaurants in the city of Dakar. Youssou spends his working day coordinating on the phone with his business partners in Italy and in the port of Dakar to check on the dispatch and customs clearance of the last container, or conferring with clients to place wares from the shipment. He does this sitting on the colourful bales of second-hand clothing that he and his partners distribute as wholesalers in the market of Colabane, the largest second-hand clothes trade market in the country. Unlike Thierno and Youssou, who are always present at their business sites, Babacar spends limited time in his impressive showroom, where the luxurious marble tiles he imports from Italy are on display for wealthy customers.

The stories of Youssou, Thierno and Babacar's business investments could not be more diverse, but the motivations that lead them to where they are now also show some striking similarities. They converge on the fact that, while economic success had been an important motivation inducing them to initially emigrate, it only partly accounted for their decision to return and invest. Thierno and Babacar both realised that a future as blue-collar workers awaited them in Italy and that it would be difficult to escape this fate. Youssou spent several years living as an undocumented immigrant in various Italian cities before recognising that he would never achieve the goal for which he had left: making money before returning. 'At one point – he says – I realised that it was just not going to happen. It was not happening for me, as for many friends around me. I wondered why I should continue staying and insisting.' Failing to make money in emigration, he was able to assess his opportunities and make new choices. If he had not taken this risk, he would not today manage a thriving business in the second-hand clothing industry in association with five Italian and two Senegalese partners. The story of yet another migrant, Bassirou, is an even more striking example of how relative economic opportunities are weighed in deciding to invest back home. Today, Bassirou owns two companies in Senegal, one in the building sector and the other in services for industry, and manages several smaller businesses on the side. Yet, until the 1990s, he had been the owner of an Italy-based company producing factory sheds. When he anticipated financial regression coming his way, he preferred selling the business rapidly instead of slowly drifting towards bankruptcy. Youssou and Bassirou both succeeded in establishing solid businesses back home. Their greatest success, however, is not economic: it is mastery over their own lives. For migrant entrepreneurs, return is a jump into the dark, a

gamble in which the bet at stake is a better future in Senegal. They have many hopes yet little knowledge of what that future might look like. In human development terms, by choosing to return they transform the ability to change their place of residence – following Martha Nussbaum (2006), a fundamental human capability – into a deliberate act of migrating back home.

Many respondents highlighted saturated markets in Italy, and described Senegal as a place where opportunities are still open, where dreaming big is still possible. One respondent stated:

I saw Senegal as a good opportunity. I thought it would be easier to set up a business here than in Italy ... In Africa today there are better opportunities than in Europe: it's a good place to invest. In calm countries like Senegal or Morocco, with hard work and sacrifice you can get somewhere. (Mawa)

Mawa's words recall those of return migrants in Burundi, who speak of their country as a virgin land full of opportunities awaiting to be reaped (Sagmo 2015: 117). Despite dreaming big, most returnees are aware that their businesses back home are likely to be financially less profitable than their former jobs in Italy. None, however, would exchange their current position for more migration. Return and business investment are balancing acts in which economic gains and other aspects that are valued important in life are renegotiated and reassembled. Human development and capability approaches to migration and development challenge the narrow utilitarianism that dominates diaspora policy. The latter reduces 'migration' to the pursuit of higher incomes or commodities and 'development' to economic growth. Instead, human development approaches place people at the centre, considering return migration as an exercise of freedom in which people are active subjects of their own lives.

As confirmed by several returnees I consulted, mixed factors contributed to Youssou, Thierno and Babacar's decision to invest in Senegal. Most frequently, other motives outweighed economic ones. As the reality of Europe not being the Eldorado that they had once imagined sunk in, they gradually started valuing their life differently:

The decision to return has many reasons, not just one. And they don't all come at the same time. One thing makes you think that you should return. Then another makes you think the same. Then you get to a certain point that you just have to return. Period. In my case, my son played an important part in that decision ... He accounted for half of the decision; the other half were the conditions in Italy. (Youssou)

I have argued elsewhere (Sinatti 2011) that personal factors, such as reunification with the family, play an important part in the decision to return. The stories of migrant entrepreneurs point to other socio-cultural influences that largely prevail over economic gains:

Development indexes are calculated only on the basis of the economy. But if we look at the social side, we see that one may not have *money*, but still has a higher level of life when his *social life* is acceptable. Am I making myself clear? (Youssou)

What Youssou means when he speaks of 'social life' is at the core of the perceived non-economic achievements and aspirations of return businessmen through their investments, which often become clear to them only after return.

In this section, I have argued that, through a deliberate choice, return migration is an enactment of people's capability to be mobile. I discuss in the next section that



transnational connections and transfers from and to Italy are essential in the business ventures of successful returnees, allowing them to further enhance their own capabilities after return. I explore how migrants may use this new freedom to expand the capabilities of others around them.

### **Transnational connections and transfers in return business practices**

At the core of successful return businesses often lies sustained transnational collaboration and exchange with the former country of immigration. Returnees have first-hand experience in both origin and immigration countries. Successful returnees, as the ones in this article, exploit this transnational positioning in their businesses, frequently through partnerships.

Thierno's ice-cream business received a strong impulse when his last Italian employer decided to look for new ventures. He invested most of the financial capital, while Thierno contributed knowledge of the Senegalese market, local contacts and a commitment to hard work. Youssou's venture in the second-hand clothing business also took off thanks to a partnership with five Italians (one of whom is now living in Senegal) and two other Senegalese migrants (residing in Italy). Having returned to Senegal a few years previously, Youssou had gained experience in this sector as a retail seller. He represented the ideal main man in Dakar for this business, thanks to his knowledge of the ins and outs of the market and to his partners' potential to arrange direct import and wholesale. What these examples illustrate is the significant role played by social capital in supporting migrant businesses. Transnational transfers of social capital, as in the form of partnerships across countries, constitute an important example of social remittance (Levitt 1998). Locally held social capital and networks, as in the form of relevant contacts in local markets, equally support return investment (Åkesson & Eriksson-Baaz 2015).

For many, partnership with Italians or with other Senegalese allows businesses to operate at a different pace. Modike, for instance, is another respondent who embodies the ideal returnee in diaspora policy. In his mid-40s, he returned to Senegal attempting his fortune with various small and informal businesses. Today, alongside three Italian partners, he co-owns a growing business in the poultry sector. When his would-be partners visited him in Senegal and suggested joining his project, he knew the partnership would enable him to take the business to another level. He had strong commercial skills and the ability to operate in the Senegalese market; his partners could import new technologies and workflows; together they applied for institutional funding to upscale and innovate an otherwise relatively common business in Senegal. On the business premises today, impressive machinery is handled by several employees. Partnership is an obvious form of transnational collaboration. Other return businesses simply cultivate regular connections with Italian suppliers. Babacar, for instance, travels regularly to Italy in order to renew and update the product catalogues of his exclusive marble tiles. Thanks to connections with their transnational and local partners, returnee investors also facilitate the transfer of other resources, such as work cultures and know-how, further confirming the significance of Levitt's (1998) notion of social and cultural remittances.

Social and cultural remittances, moreover, need not only flow in one direction. Through transnational business connections, return migrant enterprises may also bring benefits to the country of immigration. Thierno makes his ice-cream exclusively from imported basic

ingredients and secures his supplies from a well-known food industry in central Italy: 'We brought a great ice-cream company here. There are many ice-cream shops in Senegal already. Many are in Dakar. But ours has an edge on all of them: we only sell good quality Italian ice-cream' (Thierno). This example shows that Italy may benefit from these commercial engagements through new economic opportunities. Benefits, furthermore, may be more than just economic. For their second-hand clothes business, Youssou and his partners developed a trusted network of suppliers. The initiative of Youssou and partners has not only opened a new channel for their Italian contractors, who are now trading directly with Senegal and other African countries. It has also circumvented otherwise corrupt clothes collection and redistribution circuits that are controlled by criminal circles in Italy. In Youssou's own words: 'I am in the right line of business, because I believe strongly in our goals: we give work to people in Senegal and at the same time we combat crime in Italy.'

The returnee businesses analysed here rely heavily on what has been labelled post-return transnationalism (Carling & Erdal 2014): they are rooted in transnational partnerships or based on sustained trade relations with Italian suppliers. Transnational partnership, with Italians or with other Senegalese migrants based abroad, often boosts the financial basis for investment:

I wanted to invest in an activity but I didn't have enough strength. As migrants we have many obligations towards our families, which are a good thing of our culture but also make it difficult to save and invest. It takes good fortune to return and I found that in my business partners. (Modou)

The stories just outlined show that among migrant businessmen the 'double engagement' that characterises migration between Africa and Europe (Grillo & Mazzucato 2008) continues after return. Many returnee businesses are built on know-how and networks developed simultaneously in Italy and back home, proving:

[r]eturn migration and transnationalism are both phenomena which are embedded in social relations, stretched across transnational social fields, and so interconnections between the two are manifested in multiple geographic locations, and in local and transnational relational spaces. (Carling & Erdal 2014: 9)

Research findings elsewhere suggest that post-return transnational collaborations facilitate the sharing of knowledge and expertise (Setrana & Tonah 2016). Against diaspora policy interpretations of return businesses as the result of mere transfers of resources from North to South, the above suggests that they should instead be understood as the outcome of sustained transnational engagements. As I discuss in the next section, these engagements, in turn, affect not only the material resources returnees can access, but also expand their capabilities, or what they can and want to do with them. I show that returnee entrepreneurs may even choose to use their businesses as a means to further affect the capabilities of others around them.

## Entrepreneurial aspirations to enhance capabilities

A Senegalese proverb recites: *tukki bu indiwul alal indi xamxam* (when migration does not bring wealth, it brings wisdom). If the decision to return and invest is initially a gamble, once implemented it comes with greater clarity about its concrete, non-economic gains.

Respondents unanimously recognised that what they achieved in terms of economic resources is greatly outweighed by other values and assets: 'When one leaves his home, he will experience something other. This is already enriching. If not in the form of material wealth, it is at least a moral enrichment' (Thierno). This enrichment, according to most respondents, is not only due to migration as an eye-opening life experience. It also takes very concrete forms, for instance when migrants bring innovation in their businesses through new work formats or philosophies.

Return migrant businessmen may strive for economic success, moved by the investment logics of the growth-oriented entrepreneur (Sinatti 2015b). Digging deeper under the surface of this investment logic, however, one finds there is more to it than entrepreneurial aspirations of endless economic expansion.

First, many migrants feel fulfilled by their own hard work. Transnational business collaborations, in this sense, not only expand the financial input and economic achievements of their businesses. They also enhance migrants' capabilities such as personal self-respect and the possibility to lead a productive and creative life:

Everything I do here I do thanks to the help of my friends. They trusted me and I want to give back to them 200% of what they gave me. This is what gives me the strength to work 24/7 without feeling it. [My Italian partners] give me courage, strength and trust. (Thierno)

This felt obligation urges Thierno to work persistently on his ice-cream business. When he speaks about it, a spark lights up in his eyes: 'I am not afraid of working hard. ... I start at 8 and end at midnight, every day. I don't stop.' He adds that 'Italy has given me the urge to run. Because if you want to win a race, it's speed that counts' (Thierno).

Second, returnee entrepreneurs believe that through their own actions they may be of example to others. Bassirou, for instance, the migrant who had previously been an entrepreneur in Italy, condensed his advice to another returnee for whom he had taken on the role of informal mentor in the following motto: 'Keep going, work hard and you'll make it.'

Third, besides merely setting an example, all respondents analysed in this article gave employment to others and mentioned this as a very important source of pride. 'I am very happy to have Senegalese staff working for me. This already makes me a winner' (Thierno). They perceived employment as a way of giving something back to Senegal by empowering other people: 'I don't help others through charity; I help by giving people jobs' (Bassirou). Interestingly, returnee entrepreneurs do not so much emphasise the prospect of giving others access to a salary or economic gains as their own main driver. Instead, many see the employment of others as a means to change people's values in their home society. They evaluate giving work as a means to expand the capabilities of other people by influencing both the material resources they have access to and the values that shape what they do with them:

A business in Senegal not only allows you to give work to others. It also makes you proud, from a human perspective, of what you are doing. When my boss in Italy made a new prototype I saw in his eyes that he was proud of having achieved this himself, even though I had done most of the work. (Mawa)

Ownership of your own results is an important value that return entrepreneurs not only treasure for themselves, but also try and instil in others. Youssou openly strives for this in the second-hand clothing wholesale trade. The business is based on an innovative

concept and is constructed as a work-cooperative. The idea, he explains, 'is that there are no owners and that the business belongs to those who work for it. This mentality is very important, for me. No one must feel exploited; everyone must feel like they own their own job' (Youssou). Workers have specialised in separating the large bails of clothes that arrive in Senegal, each weighing 400 kilograms, on the basis of the type of clothing and its quality. They reassemble clothing into smaller 45 kilogram bails that are distributed to wholesalers and retail sellers in shops and markets. However the business goes, the cooperative system ensures that workers will earn a minimum monthly wage; however it also makes them responsible to do their best, because any additional profit is distributed equally among cooperative members. In human development terms, Youssou enhances his workers' capabilities by inciting them to take greater control of the outcomes of their actions and, ultimately, of their own lives.

The stories above illustrate that returnees expand their own and the capabilities of other people, affecting the material means as well as the values that enable them to exercise new freedoms. Similarly, Dennis Conway and Robert Potter (2007) find that many returnee Caribbean migrants who sustain transnational linkages are committed to giving something back to their home society and become influential agents of change.

Overall, return businessmen convey a strong sense of being on a mission: 'Migration is a mission. Not a permanent one, but a fixed term one. It lasts for a time and when that time is over it's the moment to go back home and be of example to others' (Moustapha). 'I want to advance Africa ... When I say that I want to advance Africa, I mean advancing society' (Thierno). Sylvie Démurger and Hui Xu (2011) reach a similar finding about return migrant entrepreneurs as an emergent new category in rural Chinese society. In Africa, Nauja Kleist (2011) shows that return migrants are often appointed as traditional authorities in Ghana, where they bring change to the Ghanaian chieftaincy system. As entrepreneurs who enjoy fuller capabilities and who influence the capabilities of others, returnees set new social examples for their workers and other people around them, reshaping societies back home.

## Conclusion

This article shows the value of a person-centred focus on return migration, entrepreneurship and development that complements scholarly work on diaspora policies in this field as a merely state-driven affair.

In public policies about migration and development, macroeconomic terms often prevail. Two frequent misconceptions characterise diaspora policy: first, development is conceived as economic growth and, second, it is seen as the outcome of resources returning from the West. In Senegal, return represents a central facet of migration policy (Sinatti 2015a & 2015b), with a predominant focus on migrant investors who can contribute to national economic development goals. Targeted policies and programmes, in Senegal as elsewhere in Africa, adopt a selective approach that is tailored towards migrant 'super-entrepreneurs' (Naudé, et al 2017). On the one hand, this approach may be instrumental to achieving the economic goals set in policies; on the other hand, it is too narrowly conceived to acknowledge the multi-faceted ways in which returnees may become drivers of homeland development.

Drawing on advancements from transnational and human development approaches to, respectively, migration and development, this article offers a critical reading of African

return migration. Beyond economic gains, by cultivating sustained transnational linkages and initiating multi-dimensional transfers, migrant returnees transform their own and other people's capabilities. I show that post-return transnationalism among return businessmen in Senegal is not only 'important for livelihoods, for instance when returnees make a living through trade or tourism based on ties to their country of residence' (Carling & Erdal 2014: 4). Returnee businesses are embedded in lasting transnational linkages between people as well as across countries and lead to multi-directional flows of resources. I illustrate that upholding these transnational linkages has important repercussions for how migrants both practice and perceive their own contribution to development back home. The returnee stories illustrated in this article therefore testify 'the complexity, interconnectedness, variability, contextuality and multi-level mediations of global change' linked with migration and return (Castles 2010: 1566).

This article has some limitations. In it, I focus exclusively on the perspectives of return migrants. The practices, experiences and understandings of non-migrants in Senegal are not addressed, nor are the ones of foreign partners and suppliers. The viewpoints of the latter in particular open new questions about the possible directions and repercussions of migrant entrepreneurship beyond the country of return: what would a people-centred focus add to our understanding of implications when not just global corporate giants, but also small-scale and private-owned businesses participate in transnational economies and circuits of capital? What transformations derive from these transnational investments and collaborations in developed countries? And in what ways can they enlarge people's capabilities? Seeking answers to these questions requires looking beyond migration studies as a biased field that emphasises certain aspects of migratory experiences over others (Castles 2010) and that often under-investigates the implications for non-migrants. Particularly when African migration is at stake, '[s]tudies of migration in less-developed countries often take poverty research as a starting point' (Castles 2010: 1570). This obscures the fact that migration has a distinctive role in transforming people's aspirations and expanding their capabilities. How, as scholars, we frame both migration and development theoretically has important implications for how we understand migrant agency in the context of transnational engagements (Raghuram 2009). Rather than focusing on the development outcome of migrants' engagement, in this article I call for a need to focus on the agency of migrants themselves in defining development objectives (Mohan & Zack-Williams 2002; De Haas & Rodríguez 2010).

Focusing on the perspectives on migration and development by return migrants this article uncovers some of the richness that is missed by the diaspora policy focus on pre-defined development goals and how they are met *through* return migrants. As Marta Bivand Erdal puts it, the juxtaposition of migrants' practices 'with state diaspora engagement policies reveals a scalar mismatch between private ... exchanges and national, macro level economic needs' (2016: 7). Policies would benefit from understanding development as a process in which people have the freedom to redefine their own values and aspirations, thus enhancing their ability to help themselves and others around them.

## Notes

1. Such as the centralised Fonds d'Appui à l'Investissement des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur (FAISE) and the delocalised Bureaux d'Accueil, d'Orientation et de Suivi des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur (BAOS). For an extensive historical overview of Senegal's initiatives, see Sinatti (2015b).

2. Senegal's diaspora policy is outlined in several policy documents, including the 'Sector policy for overseas Senegalese' (Ministère des Sénégalais de l'Extérieur 2011) and the 'National strategy for economic and social development 2013–2017' (République du Sénégal 2012).
3. This data was collected by the author between 2004 and 2014. Additional data was collected in 2016 within the project 'Demal Te Niew', funded by the European Journalism Grant to produce an ethnography-based web-documentary on return migration to Senegal. I am indebted to Marcella Pasotti and Silvia Lami for sharing extensive fieldnotes, visual material and in-depth interviews with 30 return migrant entrepreneurs.
4. This is the core meaning of 'capabilities'. Since the launch by the United Nations of the first Human Development Report in 1990, see <<http://hdr.undp.org/en>>, Amartya Sen has proposed the capabilities approach in development and advocated that policy should focus on the significance of individuals' capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value.
5. All names in this article are fictitious, to protect the anonymity of respondents.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Note on contributor

**Giulia Sinatti** is an ethnographer who has spent more than two decades researching Senegalese migration. Besides experiences of mobility among African migrants, her research interests include the governance of migration between Africa and Europe and solidarity initiatives towards new migrants and refugees in Europe.

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