Malian Student Mobility to Turkey through the Lens of Historically Marginalized Actors*

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ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the movement of the Malian student community who largely came from socially marginal backgrounds, female students and Malian Turkish scholarship students, to-wards Turkey, a new destination for study for Malian students since 2006. It analyzes the capacity of these students to realize their mobility in relation to the Turkish government's soft power in the realm of higher education scholarships. By using a transnational approach, it identifies in which contexts these students have possibilities of empowerment or are the objects of power relations or global dynamics. The paper argues that the mobility of these students to Turkey is the result of several factors, including Turkish soft power and especially the manifestation of students' ability to act.

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit der Bewegung malischer Studenten, die größtenteils aus sozial schwachen Verhältnissen stammen, sowie mit Studentinnen und malischen türkischen Stipendiaten in Richtung Türkei, die seit 2006 ein neues Studienziel für malische Studenten darstellt. Sie analysiert die Fähigkeit dieser Studenten, ihre Mobilität im Zusammenhang mit der Soft Power der türkischen Regierung im Bereich der Hochschulstipendien zu realisieren. Mit Hilfe eines transnationalen Ansatzes wird ermittelt, in welchen Kontexten diese Studierenden Möglichkeiten der Selbstbestimmung haben oder Objekte von Machtbeziehungen oder globalen Dynamiken sind. Der Beitrag argumentiert, dass der Wegzug dieser Studierenden in die Türkei das Ergebnis mehrerer Faktoren ist, einschließlich der türkischen Soft Power und insbesondere der Handlungsmacht der Studierenden.

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A significant number of Malian students consider overseas study mobility as a solution to Mali's higher education crisis, which has worsened since the 1990s.¹ Since 2006, Turkey has been one of the study destinations for Malian students. The period of secularization and introspection of Turkey in the 1920s, however, did not predict such rapprochement of this state with Mali,² a country with which, it seems, no links had been established except the calls to the *jihad* launched by the Ottoman sultan in West Africa during the beginning of the twentieth century.³ Turkey's emergence as a trading state and its strategy of developing its soft power on both the international and regional stages has transformed Turkish foreign policy from the late 1990s onwards.⁴ The Turkish government initiated in 1998 a policy of opening up towards Africa to increase economic, commercial, diplomatic, political, and cultural ties with African states, which represented a new geopolitical investment, owing to the presence of earth and raw materials as well as investment opportunities in different sectors.⁵ The development of Turkish soft power, "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments", also involved the intensification of cultural diplomacy, which rested mainly on the diffusion of Turkish culture and language, together with higher education scholarships provided by Turkish private actors and the Turkish state.⁶

In Mali, Turkish schools were first established in the late 1990s, being initially managed by a private actor – the Gülen movement – and then by the Turkish state from 2018 onwards, a consequence of the coup attempt in 2016 in Turkey. The implementation of the Bologna Process in Mali in 2008 and especially the introduction of the Turkish state scholarship, Türkiye Scholarships (Türkiye Bursları), in 2012 contributed to the growing number of Malian students studying in Turkish universities. Some 1,420 Malian students studied in Turkey between 2013 and 2018, ranking Mali the tenth largest African country sending students.⁷

Histories of Malian student mobility are not prevalent in the social sciences despite the centrality of human mobility in Sahelian societies.⁸ Malian student mobility has only

- 1 D. Diakité, La crise scolaire au Mali, in: Nordic Journal of African Studies 9 (2000) 3, pp. 6–28, p. 7.
- 2 J. Hunwick, Sub-saharan Africa and the wider world of islam: historical and contemporary perspectives, in: Journal of Religion in Africa 26 (1996) 3, pp. 230–257, p. 236.
- 3 O. Mbabia, Ankara en Afrique: stratégies d'expansion, in: Outre-Terre 29 (2011) 3, pp. 107–119, pp. 107–108; Ottoman archives (Istanbul), DH.EUM.EMN.117.69.2, report of an informant on the political situation in Mauritania, non-dated document.
- 4 A. Bulent/M. Zulkarnain, The Turkish government scholarship program as a soft power tool, in: Turkish Studies 20 (2019) 3, pp. 421–441, p. 427.
- 5 P. Hugon, Les nouveaux acteurs de la coopération en Afrique, in: Revue internationale de politique de développement (2010) 1, pp. 99–118, p. 116.
- 6 Bulent/Zulkarnain, The Turkish government, pp. 423–427.
- 7 M. Baydemir, Türkiye'de Sahraaltı Afrikalı Öğrenci Haraketliliği (2014–2018) [Sub-Saharan Student Mobility to Turkey (2014-2018)], https://www.afam.org.tr/turkiyede-sahraalti-afrikali-ogrenci-haraketliligi-2014-2018/ (accessed 8 June 2019).
- 8 E. Eyebiyi/S. Mazzella, Introduction: observer les mobilités étudiantes sud-sud dans l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur, in: Cahiers de la recherche sur l'éducation et les savoirs (2014) 13, pp. 7–24, p. 7; M. Gillabert/E. Piguet/Y. Riano, Les étudiant.e.s internationaux, in: Géo-Regards (2017) 10, pp. 5–10, p. 5; C. Lefebvre, Frontières de sable, frontière de papier, Histoire de territoires et de frontières, du Jihad de Sokoto à la colonisa-

aroused the interest of scholars in recent years concerned with the study of the postcolonial period.⁹ When historians address this topic, the training of Sahelian students in the West, the former countries of the Soviet bloc (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, USSR), and North Africa is the main area explored.¹⁰ A few recent works have started to investigate the movement of Sahelian students to Turkey, a new actor in African cooperation.¹¹

This study investigates Malian student mobility, either permanent or temporary movement,¹² between Mali and Turkey. It questions the apparent historical homogeneity of the Malian student community by analysing the lived experiences of Malian female students and Malian Turkish scholarship students, both marginalized actors in regard to Malian student mobility. The two main reasons for this focus is the fact that female students constitute a minority within the Malian student community and that mainly male students have been able to undertake overseas studies in Turkey. The former trend has been observed since Mali's independence in 1960 within the framework of Mali's educational cooperation programmes with France, Morocco, and the USSR.¹³ A focus on Malian female students allows one to grasp the ruptures or continuities between their experiences in past destinations such as the USSR and this new mobility to Turkey. Moreover, research on Sahelian student mobility has almost completely ignored the voice of students coming largely from socially marginal backgrounds, such as people from rural areas, and/or coming from families with low economic capital.

This article therefore aims to examine and explain the tension between Turkey's objectives to host foreign students and the agency of these students. Is the ownership of a Turkish scholarship more likely to be a passive receptacle of global dynamics or part of institutional power relations? What agency practices do these students use to make their

tion française du Niger, XIXe-XXe siècles, Paris 2015, p. 65.

- 9 K. Mary, Le retour difficile des jeunes Maliens formés en l'Amérique du Nord, in: Hommes & migrations 1307 (2014), pp. 39–46; N. Touré, Les étudiants maliens dans l'enseignement supérieur privé au Maroc, in : Hommes & migrations 1307 (2014), pp. 29–36; N. Touré, Mobilité internationale pour études et mobilité sociale: Trajectoires scolaires et socioprofessionnelles des étudiants maliens dans l'enseignement supérieur en France et au Maroc, PhD thesis, Université Paris Descartes, 2017, chapters 5 and 6.
- S. Bava, Les étudiants africains d'Al-Azhar au Caire, in: M. Leclerc-Olive/G. Scarfo Ghellab/A. C. Wagner (eds.), Les mondes universitaires face au marché: circulation des savoirs et pratiques des acteurs, Paris 2011, pp. 107–120; A. Dragani, Étudiants touaregs dans l'ancien bloc soviétique, in: Cahiers d'études africaines 226 (2017), pp. 417–432; F. Guimont, Les étudiants africains en France 1950–1965, Paris, 1997; O. Rillon/T. Smirnova, Quand des Maliennes regardaient vers l'URSS (1961–1991). Enjeux d'une coopération éducative au féminin, in: Cahiers d'études africaines 2 (2017) 226, pp. 331–354.
- 11 F. Alimukhamedov/E. Akcay, Turkish Internationalization of Higher Education: The Case of African Students Studying in Ankara, International Turgut Özal Congress on Business Economics and Political Science, E-Book I: Political Science and International Relations, Ankara 2016; I. Binaté, Les étudiants ouest-africains en Turquie: mobilité estudiantine et circulation de compétences, in: Diasporas (2020) 37, pp. 103–120; I. Binaté/S. B. Diané, Les produits made in Turkey en Afrique de l'Ouest: Acteurs, circulations et dynamique entrepreneuriale des jeunes, in: Afrique(s) en mouvement (2022) 4, pp. 11–19.
- 12 N. Ortar et al., Migrations, circulations, mobilités, Nouveaux enjeux épistémologiques et conceptuels à l'épreuve du terrain, Aix-en-Provence 2018, p. 17.
- 13 N. Touré, Genre et mobilité internationale pour études, origines sociales et trajectoires scolaires des étudiantes maliennes en France et au Maroc, in: Piguet/Riaño/Gillabert, Les étudiant.e.s internationaux, p. 126.

study abroad possible? In answering these questions, the study adopts a transnational approach by tracking students throughout their movement and by investigating the relationships between Mali and Turkey and the impact of student mobility.¹⁴ It draws on archives, secondary literatures, private and institutional documents, audiovisual sources, and interviews conducted during fieldwork from July 2019 to June 2020 between Mali (Bamako) and Turkey (Ankara, Istanbul, Konya, Uşak, and Izmir).¹⁵

1. Historically Marginalized Actors

The overseas studies of Jacqueline Coulibaly Ki-Zerbo and Cheick Modibo Diarra reflect well the access to the study mobility of groups that are-historically at the margins of Malian society.¹⁶ On the one hand, as a woman and daughter of a proletarian,¹⁷ Ki-Zerbo studied at La Sorbonne (Paris) in 1952 – quite a special situation as the few candidates to study in the metropole during colonization were overwhelmingly male students.¹⁸ On the other hand, after Mali's independence in 1960, Diarra obtained a scholarship to study in France in 1972, being a son of a worker and moreover an opponent of President Moussa Traoré, whose regime led to the immobility of Malian students.¹⁹ Theoretically based on a competitive basis, the selection for overseas studies was fraught with social, political, or familial considerations.²⁰

Obtaining a scholarship was an important factor that allowed disadvantaged groups, particularly economic ones, to move, since study mobility was easy to undertake by only a limited number within the minority. A diplomatic note from 1987 highlights the unequal access in Mali to studying abroad:²¹ "Those who have been trained in the West can be considered privileged. The prestige of the training they have acquired there is real. But it must be noted that they belong to influential and privileged circles."²² Higher education abroad was perceived by members of the Malian political and economic elite not only as a solution to the degradation of higher education but also as a strategy to increase social capital since the country's independence.²³ For instance, Traoré's children, Kader,

- 14 N. L. Green, The Limits of Transnationalism, Chicago 2019, p. 40.
- 15 Students' names were often changed to preserve their anonymity.
- 16 Touré, Les étudiants maliens, p. 213.
- 17 A. Mbaye d'Erneville, Femmes Africaines, Romorantin 1981, p. 86.
- 18 P. Barthélemy, Africaines et diplômés à l'époque coloniale (1918–1957), Rennes 2010, pp. 74–76.
- 19 C. M. Diarra, Navigateur interplanétaire, Paris 2000.
- 20 T. Smirnova, Révolutions malienne et russe dans les trajectoires des étudiants maliens venus en URSS à l'automne 1991, Panel paper, Mohammedia 2013, 25–26 October 2013, https://riae.hypotheses.org/179 (accessed 20 June 2022).
- 21 C. Pinto Baleisan, Migrations étudiantes sud-américaines, trajectoires sociales et bifurcations biographiques (Observatoire National de la vie étudiante), Paris 2017, p. 17.
- 22 Archives of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (La Courneuve), 2210-INVA 545, letter of Chargé d'Affaires to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 18 May 1987.
- 23 The mobilization of educational strategies by influential families was in its infancy during colonization. For example, the Tall branch from the city of Bandiagara used the colonial school to preserve their influence in the area. See J.-H. Jézéquel, Histoire de bancs, parcours d'élèves, Pour une lecture "configurationnelle" de la scolarisation

Assa, and Idrissa, unsurprisingly studied in the United States. Moreover, these factors anchored in the longue durée explain the unequal access to studies abroad among Malian society, first and foremost gender stereotypes that have affected women's education.

If coming from rural areas or having limited financial resources were disadvantages to men's educational mobility, then these difficulties could be overcome as some traditional places of Islamic learning for West Africans, such as al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, were dedicated to men and provided male students with allowances to pursue their higher education.²⁴ In contrast, for West African women the completion of schooling outside their home after adolescence was a difficult barrier to overcome in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵ The rise of Western colonial education in West Africa did not erase this gap; on the contrary, the under-enrolment of girls in schools, the late opening of the first girls school, and gender stereotypes resulted in women's immobility.²⁶ The presence of Sahelian students in the metropole started during the interwar period since France had privileged the local training of the elite given the lack of financial means to include more of the society.²⁷ Tiémoko Garan Kouyaté, a male born in Segou in 1902, was among the few Sahelians trained in France in the 1920s.²⁸ When women finally gained access to colonial schooling, their study abroad was hampered by men's restrictions and gendered representation of mobility practice, as the case of Madina Ly Tall illustrates. She was allowed to study in France in 1959 by her father only after she had been married.²⁹

The funding of studies abroad was not a new creation by the Great Powers with the decolonization of African territories; it had existed beforehand. Sahelian students studied at some Islamic higher education institutions of North Africa thanks to study allowances provided by Sahelian rulers or endowments (*wakf*) related to the institution.³⁰ During the independence of the continent, there was the innovative establishment of scholarship programmes, a component of educational cooperation, between African states and former colonial states, former countries of the USSR, or Western states.³¹ Scholarship programmes were originally conceived as a means to increase human capital by sending students abroad and to solve the lack of higher education institutions in West Africa. At

à l'époque coloniale, in: Cahiers d'Études Africaines 43 (2003) 169/170, pp. 409–433, pp. 422–424; Touré, Les étudiants maliens, p. 213.

- 24 Egyptian National Archives (Cairo), 5004 001525, Foreign students between 1867 and 1924 registered in students' accomodation.
- 25 M. Thiam, Women in Mali, in: Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History, Oxford University Press Online (accessed 10 May 2022), p. 10.

- 27 J.-H. Jézéquel, The Maturing Phase of Colonial Rule, ca. 1920–1960, "Collecting customary law": Educated Africans Ethnographic Writings and Colonial justice in French West Africa, in: B. N. Lawrance/E. Lynn Osborn/R. L. Roberts (eds.), Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa, Wisconsin 2006, p. 148.
- 28 C. Coquery-Vidrovitch, Colonisation, coopération, partenariat, les différentes étapes (1950–2000), in: M. Sot, Étudiants africains en France (1951–2001), Cinquante ans de relations France-Afrique, Quel avenir?, Paris 2002, p. 31.
- 29 M'baye D'Erneville, Femmes, pp. 41-59.
- 30 French colonial archives (Aix-en-Provence), 1 AFFPOL 906, letter of the French Consulate in Cairo, 20 March 1912.
- 31 Rillon/Smirnova, Quand des Maliennes, pp. 331-333.

²⁶ Barthélémy, Africaines, p. 34.

the time of the decolonization of the region, Senegal was the only country that had a higher education institution in the region. In 1987, Mali had bilateral relationships in education with several countries, such as Arabic countries as well as the USSR and former Soviet countries, which provided scholarships to train Malian students.³²

Despite this diversification of study destinations, the training of woman was not a desideratum of the Malian state, and scholarships were parsimoniously issued to women.³³ Thanks to the efforts of two Malian feminist organizations (the Comission Sociale des Femmes and the Union Nationale des Femmes du Mali), a hundred women were trained from the mid-1970s onwards in the USSR in sectors previously devoted to men, such as medicine, law, and economy. The low enrolment rate of women in Malian higher education in 2015 (3.2 per cent of women, compared to 7.7 per cent of men),³⁴ as well as the low numbers of Malian female students in France, Morocco, or Turkey, compared to those of men,³⁵ supports the idea that women's unequal access to study mobility is still a current issue in Mali.

2. Clearing a Path in Malian Student Mobility

Since 2006, Malian students have been studying in Turkey although it is likely that some students have studied in Ankara and Istanbul since the late 1980s within the framework of the scholarships granted by the Islamic Development Bank.³⁶ The first Malian students to train in Turkey in 2006 were former students of Turkish schools affiliated with a Turkish transnational movement, the Gülen movement, which established these schools beginning in the 1990s in Africa, for example, in Nigeria and Mali.³⁷ These schools played a preponderant role in the mobility of Malian students to Turkey by organizing entrance examinations for Turkish universities and promoting scholarship offers – funded by the movement– between 2006 and 2018, a period during which the organization's interest converged with the Turkish state in the fostering of Turkish culture and language abroad, particularly in Africa.³⁸

Women belonging to wealthy families have also been part of the different educational training in Turkey. Their parents' economic resources have allowed them to take on the study costs of Turkish private universities without being dependent on institutional

³² Archives of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (La Courneuve), 2210-INVA 545, Letter of Chargé d'Affaires to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 18 May 1987.

³³ For an overview of the issuing of Russian scholarship to African women between 1961 and 1991, see Smirnova/ Rillon, Quand des Maliennes, pp. 342–345.

³⁴ UNESCO, Mali, uis.unesco.org/fr/country/ml (accessed 21 June 2022).

³⁵ Touré, Genre et mobilité, p. 126.

³⁶ S. Mahir, A Different Kargo: Sub-Saharan Migrants in Istanbul and African Commerce, in: Urban anthropology 43 (2014) 1–3, pp. 143–203, p. 159.

³⁷ Interview with a student, 6 February 2020 in Istanbul; G. Angey-Sentuc, Challenging the Soft Power Analysis: A Case Study of African Students in the Gülen Movement's Turkey, in: European Journal of Turkish Studies (2015) 21, p. 2.

³⁸ Interview with a member of Turkish school in Bamako, 23 July 2019.

scholarships. Malian students with limited financial resources meanwhile have included Turkey as a destination for their studies abroad, largely only after the introduction of higher education scholarships provided by the Turkish state: the Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı'nın (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, YTB) and the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs). The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is also involved in promoting this scholarship programme.³⁹ This international organization is engaged in an academic interaction programme among member states to enable the socioeconomic development of the Muslim world.

As a country of the Group of Twenty (G20), Turkey provides a quota of scholarships for students from least developed countries, such as Mali. The scholarships are promoted on the YTB's website and in Turkish schools in Mali. Every year, the institution sends agents to Mali to conduct entrance exams for Turkish universities in these schools. These exams are open to all Malian students. The winners of the exams receive a scholarship (full or partial) to study only in Turkish public universities. Moussa Diawara, who arrived in Turkey in 2017, is an example of the graduates recruited by the Turkish state after obtaining various degrees abroad:

I completed my education in Mali, in a Franco-Arab school, then in Egypt at Mahaad al qirat and then I spent four years in Medina. I am currently in a Master's programme in Konya where I am studying the tafsir [exegesis] of the Quran. In Saudi Arabia, I did not have the possibility to continue my Master's degree. A friend from Burkina Faso informed me about the YTB scholarship. I then applied.⁴⁰

The YTB scholarship allows international students to study in more than 200 educational sectors, whereas the Diyanet scholarship is limited exclusively to sectors in Islamic studies. The Turkish religious private foundations, such as the Fondation de Solidarité et d'Aide au Peuple Malien (FOSAPMA) in Mali, are also among the contributors providing scholarships for economically disadvantaged students. The Malian state does not control the student mobility towards Turkey, as a member of the government affirms: "We do not have control over these students. The embassy promotes them on social networks, or the students contact the universities directly."⁴¹ Owing to the absence of supervision of the departure of students, the Malian state is not directly responsible for the unequal access to student mobility to Turkey.

This responsibility is rather shouldered by families that can enrol their children in highquality schools, such as Turkish schools in Bamako. These families often adopt strategies to maximize their children's education in Mali and provide their children the key factors to be selected for student mobility outside the African continent, resulting in what is close to social closure, the process by which a dominant group with upper-class back-

³⁹ Organisation of Islamic Conference, Scholarship portal, https://scholarship.oic-oci.org/about/ (accessed 22 June 2022).

⁴⁰ Interview with Moussa Diawara, 29 November 2019, in Konya.

⁴¹ Interview with a member of Mali's Directorate of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche Scientifique (DGESRS), 19 July 2019 in Bamako.

grounds seize opportunities to access elite positions.⁴² All the benefits given to these families by their cultural, social, or economic positions are mobilized: for instance, enrolling from preschool onwards the children in early learning courses in foreign languages, including sometimes Turkish, or having private lessons or staying abroad to improve language skills.⁴³ These strategies not only socially reproduce this privileged position but also limit the access of other social groups to study mobility as well as upward mobility. Notwithstanding, not only is the journey to Turkey by marginalized actors attributed to institutional actions or privileged families' strategies, but several factors are also involved in a mobility project.⁴⁴ Dembélé, a 34-vear-old male student, obtained a scholarship from the YTB to conduct a PhD in agrobusiness in Ankara. The achievement of Dembélé's study staying in Turkey required not only a Turkish scholarship but also the overcoming of several difficulties. He comes from a family of farmers, uneducated, who placed more importance on farm work than on studies. He studied in the village of Dogoni in a public school until the end of his secondary education. He then moved to his brother's house in Sikasso to study for high school. He had to ride his bike for an hour every day to reach his school. After obtaining his baccalaureate, he went to Bamako to study economics and management at the university; however, the delay in the payment of scholarships based on social criteria led him "to go to the market to get something, or to work as a guard in companies" during his studies. He obtained a diploma in advanced studies in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). He returned to Bamako in 2014 to teach econometrics and environmental economics in private universities and is a temporary lecturer at the University of Bamako. Having obtained scholarships to study in Kano (Nigeria) and Ankara, Dembélé finally turned to Turkey for security reasons: "As for Nigeria, since it was in the North, there was Boko-Haram, I was a little afraid to go there. I told myself I would go to Turkey because the environment is favourable."

Access to an informational network is a push factor for student mobility. Among the 29 students who replied to a survey, 10 students affirm that they became acquainted with studies in Turkey through an intermediary (parents, former students, professors, etc.) who promoted the scholarship and acted as a prescriber or spokesperson for official institutions, by "relaying information and sometimes referring their compatriots to student mobility".⁴⁵ Occasionally, the intermediary shares their experience in Turkey with families who want to send their children to study abroad. Fanta's mobility project to Turkey had to face her parents' gender stereotypes before the intervention by Mariam and her family:

⁴² Mary, Le retour difficile, pp. 45–46; A. Zan Vanten, La fabrication familiale et scolaire des élites et les voies de mobilité ascendante en France, in: Année sociologique 66 (2016) 1, pp. 81–114.

⁴³ Interview with Hawa, a pupil's parent of a Turkish school, 26 July 2019, in Bamako; S. O. Diarra et al., Le Mali: politiques éducatives et système éducatif actuel, in: M. Pilon/Y. Yaro (eds.), La demande d'éducation en Afrique: état des connaissances et perspectives de recherche, Dakar 2001, p. 153.

⁴⁴ D. Efionayi/E. Piguet, Les étudiants d'Afrique de l'Ouest face à la globalisation du savoir, in: Revue internationale de politique de développement 5 (2014) 2, p. 4, http://journals.openedition.org/poldev/1730 (accessed 21 June 2022).

⁴⁵ Eyebiyi/Mazzella, Introduction: Observer, p. 9; Saul, A Different Kargo, p. 163.

At first my mother didn't want me to go abroad because I am a girl. She thought it was easier for a boy to face difficulties outside. She thought that I was young and not used to living alone. When I heard that Mariam was in Turkey, I had known her since high school. I asked her to intervene with her parents to reassure them.⁴⁶

For Fanta, there is no link between gender stereotypes in education and ethnicity, whereas another woman who self-identifies as belonging to the Soninke ethnic group emphasizes the novelty of this practice within the group in this way: "I am lucky to be studying in Turkey, because usually Soninke girls are married at this age."⁴⁷ Yet, their testimonies are not indicative of all Malian women's experiences in Turkey.

Like their counterparts in Morocco or France, these women often belong to affluent social groups for whom studying abroad is a practice taken for granted.⁴⁸ Their parents often had already travelled abroad for their studies. In addition to the access to networks, the cost of living, degree of racism, religious practices, and economic and geopolitical contexts were among the factors taken into consideration by these students during their studies abroad. Choosing not to stay in Mali but to travel to Turkey, these students demonstrate that mobility is above all the decision of an individual.⁴⁹

3. The Very Contrasting Lived Experiences in Turkey

Overseas studies have always been a project desired by most students in Mali irrespective of their backgrounds owing to the degradation of the country's higher education system.⁵⁰ However, once overseas, students have faced some difficulties connected with the capacity of Turkish institutions to shape the study stay. Common difficulties shared by all Malian students, and sometimes by other migrants, are linguistic barriers, cultural differences, racism, and food adaptation.⁵¹ There are nevertheless difficulties that reflect the very contrasting experiences of marginalized groups, such as sexual harassment experienced by women in the streets, financial predicaments faced by economically disadvantaged students, as well as attempts by Turkish locals to religiously influence students. Although sexual harassment deserves further attention, the sources available allow this article to focus on the two latter issues.

- 47 Interview with a student, 29 November 2019, in Konya.
- 48 Touré, Genre et mobilité, pp. 129-130.
- 49 A. R. Michaelis, Brain Drain and Brain Gain, in: Interdisciplinary Science Review 15 (1990) 3, pp. 193–195, p. 195.

51 Saul, A Different Kargo, p. 164; Y. Sayman/D. Simsek, "Cabuk Cabuk", Istanbul'daki Afrikalilar [Africans in Istanbul], Istanbul 2018.

⁴⁶ Interview with Fanta, 28 January 2020, in Istanbul. Even if the ethnonyms linked to certain groups do not actually refer to any specific population, the use of this term is legitimized since native actors use this category. See J. Bazin, A chacun son Bambara, in: J.-L. Amselle/E. M'bokolo, Au cœur de l'ethnie: Ethnie, tribalisme et état en Afrique, Paris 1985, pp. 87–127. See also F. G. Richard/K. C. Macdonald, Ethnic Ambiguity and the African Past, Materiality, History, and the Shaping of Cultural identities, Walnut Creek 2015.

⁵⁰ Diarra, Navigateur, p. 108; B. Sangaré, Être étudiant au Mali: Chroniques d'une vie d'étudiant, Bamako 2016, p. 33.

Between 2008 and 2016, one of the challenges faced by the students of the Gülen movement was the tension between their freedom and the movements's objectives of providing assistance, which were scholarships or free housing in student residences. Since the 1990s, the Gülen movement, a religious organization that advocates Islam and modernity, has used educational cooperation – for example, the establishment of schools abroad or higher education scholarships – as a tool for disseminating its message.⁵² The scholarship has been a tool utilized by the movement to influence students' careers, particularly former alumni of their colleges who often could not financially afford studying abroad. The goal was to employ these alumni, once they graduated, as teachers in their schools in Africa, in a similar way to Turkish schools in Kenya in 2015.⁵³ By selecting "math, history, English, subjects that lead to teacher", a student's opportunities of obtaining a scholarship increased.⁵⁴ Modibo, who was a student, describes the daily life in the student residence (*tstk evleri*), founded by the movement or their businessmen:⁵⁵

The apartments were composed of three or four rooms. They chose a person in charge, always a Turk, who controlled the exits and entries. There were never two foreigners of the same nationality in the same apartment. We met to drink çay [tea], read the Quran, talk about Gülen or their vision of Islam. There was the obligatory daily reading between 7 and 9 pm kitab okuma we read the Quran or the works of Said Nursi or Fethullah Gülen. We were allowed 400 TRY per month as a budget, but those who behaved well could have more. The esnaf is the one who finances, it finances all the meals, the accommodation, almost everything is taken care of by the esnaf. The African students didn't like it because they were spreading the ideology of Hizmet [another name for the Gülen movement]. They tried to leave the scholarship to be more free.⁵⁶

Although the transmission of ideals is carried out in a discreet way with students in schools abroad,⁵⁷ it is more active in student residences in Turkey. The organization imposes gatherings to diffuse the movement's ideals through compulsory readings of the works of the movement's major thinkers (Said Nursi and Fetullah Gülen) and the Quran. Control is exercised over the residents through the appointment of a confidential friend (*abi*) who is regularly connected with the movement's administration.⁵⁸ Increasing the amount of the scholarship is a tool to push students to adopt the movement's norms and values. It is a positive measure to which economically disadvantaged students could be responsive to in order to improve their economic conditions. Social cohesion is

58 Ibid., p. 164.

⁵² Angey-Sentuc, Challenging the Soft Power, p. 2; B. Balci, Missionnaires de l'Islam en Asie centrale: Les écoles turques de Fethullah Gülen, Paris 2003, p. 143.

⁵³ G. Angey-Sentuc, Le mouvement musulman turc de Fethullah Gülen en Afrique subsaharienne: faire l'école au transnational, in: Politique africaine 3 (2015) 139, pp. 32–33.

⁵⁴ Interview with a student, 1 February 2020 in Istanbul.

⁵⁵ B. Balci, Fethullah Gulen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam, in: Religion, State & Society 31 (2003) 2, pp. 151–177, p. 157.

⁵⁶ Interview with a student, 29 February 2020, in Uşak.

⁵⁷ Balci, Fethullah Gulen's, p. 163.

encouraged by separating Malian students from local students, a process meant to avoid student empowerment strategies. The movement undertakes socialization processes, "the voluntary and explicit process of structuring an individual's personality", throughout the students' education: primary socialization during childhood in schools abroad and then secondary socialization, which draws on the achievements made during primary socialization, in student residences in Turkey.⁵⁹ Although the movement is a private actor, the actions taken echo the attempts of some states – such as Saudi Arabia, Libya, or Egypt – to religiously influence students, using scholarships to export their vision of Islam to students since the 1970s.⁶⁰

Economic Issues

Malian students face economic issues for two reasons: structural and conjunctural. The YTB scholarship amount is a structural reason, as raised by Karim:

The scholarship I get is not enough. I have to take care of my own expenses but also support my family back home [wife, children, and parents]. I had to bring my wife or I would have to divorce her because I hadn't been back home for three years. Life is difficult in Turkey, [the] YTB offers a scholarship of 500 dollars, about 1200 TRY. There was an increase during the economic crisis to 1400 TRY but it is not enough, because I have to pay a rent of 700 TRY, plus the heating 145 TRY, plus my meals [...] I am not allowed to work, but I work illegally as an interpreter [Turkish-French] or a company but it is illegal.⁶¹

Similar to statements made by a significant number of students with a fellowship from the Turkish state, this student reports the insufficient allowance, which has worsened since the Turkish financial crisis in 2018, resulting in "significant impacts on its economy through its currency, which has been a historic fall in value".⁶² Karim's economic hardship increasing due to the assistance that he must provide for his family coming from a rural area – similar to migrants who frequently transfer finances to their families owing to the absence of a formal social security system in their home countries.⁶³ Working in parallel with the studies is the solution adopted by students to supplement the scholarships. Theoretically, Turkish law allows international students after completing their first study year in Turkey to work up to 24 hours per week.⁶⁴ Given the price and the delay

⁵⁹ M. Castra, Socialisation, in: Les 100 mots de la sociologie (2013), http://journals.openedition.org/sociologie/1992 (accessed 15 June 2022).

⁶⁰ Hunwick, Sub-saharan Africa, pp. 231–232; O. Kane, Beyond Timbuktu, An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa, Cambridge 2016, p. 135; R. Otayek, Le radicalisme islamique au sud du Sahara: Da'wa, arabisation et critique de l'Occident, Paris 1993, p. 10.

⁶¹ Anonymous interview; no mention of date and city of this witness to respect anonymity.

⁶² Embassy of Mali in Ankara, Activity Report of the Embassy of Mali in Turkey/Ankara for the year 2018, p. 1.

⁶³ A. Sougane, Migrations et transferts: un état des lieux, in: J. Brunet-Jailly et al. (eds.), Le Mali contemporain, Marseille 2014, pp. 613–642, p. 613.

⁶⁴ Alimukhamedov/Akcay, Turkish internationalization, p. 594.

for obtaining a work permit, students often work illegally. They are usually employed regardless of the working conditions guaranteed by Turkish labour law in the restaurant, hotel, tourism, and translation sectors.

The state of emergency that followed the 2016 coup attempt was a destructuring event for several Malian students, who in turn had to find economic sources to pursue their studies in Turkey.⁶⁵ Malian students were affected by measures taken by the Turkish state: repatriation, the refusal of resident permits or visas (for those abroad), being taken into custody, or the closure of institutions.⁶⁶ The state wished to remove the Gülen movement from the national and international stage and to take over the administration of Turkish schools in Mali.⁶⁷ This desire became real in 2017 with the transfer of Turkish schools in Mali to the Turkish government.⁶⁸ The first consul of the Malian embassy in Ankara reports that after the coup attempt, several students were affected by "the loss of facilities in their training"⁶⁹ – meaning the loss of scholarships funded by Turkish religious institutions, particularly those provided by the Gülen movement. Ibrahim received financial support for his accommodation. He was in Istanbul during the coup attempt; when he returned to his city, he realized,

When I returned from Istanbul, I found that they [the Turkish authorities] ad burned all my books. They had filled a suitcase with my things. My life was turned upside down because I had to pay for everything now to continue my studies. I had to pay bills. I started looking for a job in a hotel and a new place to live. If you went on vacation, it was very difficult to come back, the lucky ones were those who stayed.⁷⁰

Ibrahim was suspected to be affiliated with the Gülen movement, which has been regarded as a terrorist movement by Turkish courts since 2014⁷¹ and as being responsible for the 2016 coup attempt.⁷² The living conditions of this student, who was already economically vulnerable, were threatened in Turkey as he became embroiled in the power struggle between the Gülen movement and the Turkish state. The Turkish state demonstrates its power to violently discipline the supposed opponent of the state through the destruction of books.⁷³ This violation of freedom, which is anchored in the longue durée, is not surprising since Turkey prioritizes state security over democracy and civil liberties. Turkey is paradoxically an area where students find diverse resources that enable them to initiate diverse projects behind interactions between the home and the host countries.

⁶⁵ G. Kurt, État d'urgence et involution autoritaire en Turquie: l'exemple des Universitaires pour la paix, in: Cultures & Conflits 1 (2019) 113, pp. 71– 88, p. 79.

⁶⁶ Embassy of Mali in Ankara, Activity Report of the Embassy of Mali in Turkey/Ankara for the year 2018, p. 20.

⁶⁷ B. Augé, Putsch manqué de 2016 en Turquie: Quelles conséquences sur la relation Turquie-Afrique? in: Note de l'IFRI, 2018, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Interview with the Turkish ambassador in Mali, 19 July 2019, in Bamako.

⁶⁹ Interview with the First Council of Mali embassy in Ankara, 2 Decmber, 2019 in Istanbul.

⁷⁰ Interview with a student, 28 February 2020, in Uşak.

⁷¹ Bulent/Zulkarnain, The Turkish government, p. 428.

H. Bozarslan, Le coup d'état raté en Turquie, in: Esprit 9 (2016), pp. 10–15, p. 10; Kurt, État d'urgence, p. 87.

⁷³ D. Yonucu, The Absent Present Law: An Ethnographic Study of Legal Violence in Turkey, in: Social and Legal Studies 27 (2018) 6, pp. 716–733, p. 718.

4. Student-led Projects: The Result of Turkish Soft Power?

Malian students conduct several projects in education, cultural, commerce, or humanitarian realm individually or though the association of Malian students, the Association des Étudiants Maliens en Turquie (AEMT), officially established in Turkey in 2018.⁷⁴ Students attempt to contribute to Mali's socioeconomic development through the implementation of humanitarian projects in collaboration with Turkish partners.⁷⁵ The shipment of Turkish commercial products to Mali is also an activity developed to increase their skills or their living conditions.⁷⁶

One of the interpretations of these activities is the success of Turkey in projecting soft power through the creation of educational ambassadors to promote its image abroad.⁷⁷ Kudret Bulbul, the head of the YTB, affirms one of the goals of the institution is "to raise friends of Turkey".⁷⁸ Turkey's friends are these foreign graduated students, often Turkish speaking who are likely to become leaders in their home countries and committed to the reinforcement of relations with Turkey. The establishment of an association of Malian alumni students who studied in Turkey in Bamako could represent a solid argument for this reading. In this study, nevertheless, the maintained interpretation is that the conduct of various projects by Malian students is the result of several factors, including Turkish soft power and especially the manifestation of students' ability to act.

The USSR, famous for its attempts to spread communist ideals through the training of African students – for example, through optional courses in Marxist-Leninist theory, travel, health care, and small gifts – failed to export its ideology.⁷⁹ For the Tuareg students trained in the USSR between 1960 and 1990, rather than adopting Marxist ideals, they instead acquired a more deep awareness of international geopolitical issues.⁸⁰ Similar failure can be observed among the Malian women trained in the USSR during the same period. They rather used the instruments of influence to develop individual strategies, particularly in their professional careers, or to challenge the androcentric nature of the Malian state.⁸¹ The reason for these failures is that the commitment effectively is long-term, influenced by different factors such as encounters, predispositions, socialization, or private life, as the case of Kadiatou Sow illustrates it.

Sow (b. 1953), a Malian female figure in social and political movements between 1977 and 1980, was introduced to socialist ideas by her father from childhood.⁸² Marxist

- 75 Bulent/Zulkarnain, The Turkish government, p. 422. Interview conducted on 2 November 2019 in Ankara.
- 76 Interview with M. Dembélé, 2 November 2019, in Ankara.
- 77 Bulent/Zulkarnain, The Turkish government scholarship, p. 421.

- 80 Dragani, Étudiants touaregs, p. 425.
- 81 Rillon/Smirnova, Quand des Maliennes, pp. 348-349.

⁷⁴ Association des Étudiants Maliens de Turquie, Receipt of Declaration, 12 May 2018.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 427.

⁷⁹ Archives of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (La Courneuve), 2210-INVA 545, letter of Chargé d'Affaires to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 18 May 1987. Rillon/Smirnova, Quand des Maliennes, p. 345.

⁸² O. Rillon, Quand les filles s'en mêlent, Le mouvement étudiant à l'épreuve des rapports de genre au Mali (1977– 1980), in: F. Blum/P. Guidi/O. Rillon, Étudiants africains en mouvements, Contribution à une histoire des années 1968, Paris 2017, pp. 224–225.

philosophy classes at the Lycée Notre-Dame-Du-Niger (a Catholic girls' high school) opened her mind to issues of class struggle and injustice. After obtaining her baccalaureate in 1974, she studied literature and law in Nice, where she obtained a Master of Arts in 1978. Between 1974 and 1979, she militated for two African associations (the Fédération des Étudiants d'Afrique Noire en France and the Association des Étudiants et Stagiaires Maliens en France): in the latter organisation, she held the position of general secretary in 1976. Her arrival in higher education marked a further step in her commitment to activism through her insertion into political and trade union networks in France. Her anchorage in militancy was consolidated by her marriage to a youth activist in France in 1976. In addition to putting her academic skills at the service of political exiles and migrants, she led meetings for the release of Malian political prisoners. She also established links with extreme left-wing organisations, which led to her ideological radicalisation and the use of direct-action methods. From France, she took part in the demands of Malian students in Mali.

Examples of Students' Ability to Act

Another, Fatoumata Youchaou Traoré, opened in Bamako an agency, the Successway, in response to the demand for student mobility abroad, including Turkey, among Malian students.⁸³ Her experience as a former student in Turkey was an important factor in the establishment of the Successway, but not solely; her first three experiences counted too:

I worked for the Aga Khan Foundation in Mali, I was in the mobility management department, collecting funds for projects. I had a six-month contract. After three months, I couldn't see myself continuing, because I'm a person who doesn't like to respect the rules: coming in the morning and leaving in the afternoon didn't suit me. So, I resigned and looked for other opportunities. I started out in transportation, but that quickly turned sour.

Fatoumata obtained a bachelor's degree in 2017 from Antalya International University in Turkey. Since 2016, she has fulfiled the role of prescriber by assisting Malian newcomers in going through the application process to study Turkey. She had improved her knowledge in Turkish as well as the social context thanks to her staying. When she returned to Mali in 2017, she worked in her father's school, then for the international development agency, the Aga Khan Foundation, and ended up as an entrepreneur in education. Her father's, Youchaou Traoré, involvement in education probably played a role in this choice. He was a former English teacher in the American Peace Corps (the US government agency specialized in international assistance), opening his own school

⁸³ Interview with Fatoumata Youchaou Traoré, 26 June 2019, in Bamako; Malijet, Successway Mali: une nouvelle chance pour les bacheliers désirant étudier à l'étranger, 19 August 2019, https://malijet.com/la_societe_malienne_aujourdhui/education_et_formation_au_mali/231788-successway-mali-une-nouvelle-chance-pour-lesbacheliers-desirant.html (accessed 21 June 2022).

complex in Bamako in 2000.⁸⁴ The Successway focused on establishing contacts with Turkish private universities and Malians able to finance studies abroad. In 2019, contacts were established with Istanbul Şehir University and Bahçeşehir University in Istanbul. Students from economically disadvantaged groups in Turkey engage further in cultural or academic activities than in commercial activities that could improve their living conditions. They aim to foster intercultural communication by dismantling racism, preconceptions, or stereotypes towards them, as reported by a student in Izmir: "They [Turks] have a lot of stereotypes, for them, Africans are hyperviril, athletic and poor".⁸⁵ More subtly, stereotypes become visible through some questions addressed to students: "The Turks ask some very strange questions: Do you eat with animals in Africa? Do you sleep with animals? Are there hospitals in Africa?"⁸⁶ The anchoring of these stereotypes can be explained historically by the parenthesis between Africa and Turkey during Turkey's secularization and introspection period in the 1920s, the marginalization of Turks of African origin in Turkish society, and an education system that does not stimulate the acquisition of knowledge concerning certain geographical areas or societies.⁸⁷

The media and cinema are now the main vectors of diffusion of these stereotypes, as the adventure comedy *Recep Ivedik 6* illustrates.⁸⁸ Ranked among the ten best movies on the platform Netflix between April and May 2020, this movie contributes to the dissemination of reductionist images of Kenya. The country is depicted without infrastructure, a territory dominated by nature, and a population that is cannibalistic. It suffices to say that debunking these stereotypes is not an easy matter for Malian students. Two students achieved to change the perception of African countries among comrades by adopting the intellectual, cognitive approach of intercultural relations.⁸⁹ These students used mainly academic context to share knowledge about the history, arts, and/or literature of Malian or West African cultures. During an academic presentation, Karim, a student in Muğla, transmitted the realities of his own society to his classmate by presenting African empires and describing ethnicities and the way of life in West Africa.⁹⁰ He recalled Timbuktu's heyday in the sixteenth century. This information aroused astonishment among students:

I said during the presentation that Sankoré University was older than Istanbul University and that at its peak in the sixteenth century, there were over 25,000 students. The

⁸⁴ D. Lewis, Nazneen Kanji, Non-Governmental Organizations and Development, Oxon 2009, p. 187.

⁸⁵ Interview with David, student, 29 February 2020, in Izmir.

⁸⁶ Interview with Karim, student, 31 January 2020, in Istanbul.

⁸⁷ Hunwick, Sub-Saharan Africa, p. 236; E. Durugönül, The Invisibility of Turks of African Origin and the Construction of Turkish Cultural Identity: The Need for a New Historiography in: Journal of Black Studies 3 (2003) 33, pp. 281–294, pp. 285–287. Turks of African descent, or Afro-Turks, are people who self-identify as Afro-Turks because their ancestors came to Turkey as part of the slave trade during the Ottoman period.

⁸⁸ Togan Gökbakar, Recep Ivedik 6, November 2019. Interview with a student on 8 October 2019 in Istanbul.

⁸⁹ Interview with a student, 8 October 2019, in Istanbul; J. Demorgon, L'exploration interculturelle: Pour une pédagogie internationale, Paris 1989, p. 89; B. Shan, La communication interculturelle: Ses fondements, les obstacles à son développement, in: Communication et organisation 24 (2004), http://journals.openedition.org/communicationorganisation/2928 (accessed 21 June 2022).

⁹⁰ Interview with Karim, student, 31 January 2020, in Istanbul.

students were sceptical at first but after checking on the internet, they believed me. They were amazed at the realities of Africa. They discovered another side of Africa. After this presentation, I didn't hear any more weird questions about the African way of life.

Karim's interest in cultural activities did not start in Turkey but in Timbuktu, during his childhood. In 2013, he joined the association Lecture vivante, whose objective is to encourage reading and to facilitate access to good information through different activities (literary cafes, literary dunes, talks, debates, writing workshops, mobile libraries, etc.). After receiving a scholarship from FOSAPMA in 2017, he travelled to Turkey. He brought with him the book Aspect de la civilization africaine (written by Amadou Hampâté Bâ), which he reads frequently to remember African traditions. In 2018, he became a member of the African students' culture association, the Muğla, Afrikalı Öğrenciler Kültür Topluluğu. One year later, he became the secretary. The goal of this association is to promote African cultures through the organization of cultural days, during which songs, dances, and meals are honoured. Since 2017, the association has established a link with Turks with African descent through their association, Anadolu Afrikalılar Dayanışma Derneğinin (Anatolian Africans Solidarity Association).⁹¹ The involvement in this association is important to him to acquire leadership and collaboration skills. In addition to this personal input, Karim's cultural activities demonstrate how students are contributing to the redefinition of ideas about West Africa locally.

5. Conclusion

Exploring the movement of the Malian student community who largely came from socially marginal backgrounds to Turkey, this study investigates the capacity of these students to realize their mobility in relation to the Turkish government's soft power in the realm of higher education scholarships. A transnational approach is useful to identify in which contexts these students have possibilities of empowerment or are the objects of power relations or global dynamics. The focus on students' life stories reveals that the mobility to Turkey is the result of multiple determinants. In Mali, students express their decision-making power by taking into consideration several factors – such as communication networks, the cost of living, degree of racism, religious practices, and economic and geopolitical contexts – that challenge their (im)mobility, anchored in the longue durée and resulting from social closure or gender stereotypes.

Once the students have crossed national borders and arrived in Turkey, the attempt by private actors to religiously influence the students, the insufficient scholarship amounts, and the disciplinary practices used during the state of emergency contributed to reducing their ability to act. Despite these difficulties, Malian students from socially marginal

⁹¹ Haber Turk, Afrikalı öğrenciler, "Afro Türkler" ile buluştu [African Students met "Afro-Turks"], 15 April 2017, https:// www.haberturk.com/yerel-haberler/haber/11621254-afrikali-ogrenciler-afro-turkler-ile-bulustu (accessed 21 June 2022).

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backgrounds have engaged in cultural or academic activities to change the Turkish society's perception of Mali and to dismantle stereotypes of which they are the objects. If this result merges with Turkey's objective of welcoming foreign students, then foremost their engagement is often explained by encounters, predispositions, socialization, or private life. The celebration of Turkey Day at the University of Legal and Political Sciences of Bamako, on 8 July 2021, is an indicator of the increase in Turkish-Malian educational relations and certainly of the number of future departures to Turkey in the future.⁹²

⁹² Université des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Bamako, Journée de la Turquie à l'USJPB: Célébration de l'amitié scientifique et académique turco-malienne, 12 July 2021, http://usjpb.edu.ml/site/node/238 (accessed 21 June 2022).