

Original Research Article

Technology, Skill Transmission, and Beliefs: Social Dynamics of Malian Migrants' Integration into the Bovine Sector at Port-Bouët (Abidjan)

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Abstract: This study examines how mechanisation, the transmission of skills, and religious beliefs structure the integration of Malian migrants into the bovine sector at Port-Bouët. Based on a qualitative approach combining semi-structured interviews and participant observation, it demonstrates that integration rests upon structured professional socialisation, intergenerational mentorship, and the strategic deployment of faith as both symbolic and economic capital. Findings reveal that mechanisation reshapes labour relations while enhancing the value of human and social capital. Migrant success thus emerges at the intersection of technology, skill acquisition, and religious rationalities, consolidating community anchorage and economic autonomy.

Keywords: Mechanisation and Labour, Intergenerational Transmission, Beliefs and Integration.

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INTRODUCTION

The empirical findings of the study on Malians operating within the cattle sector at the Port-Bouët abattoir reveal that economic integration is closely contingent upon the interplay between mechanisation, the acquisition of practical skills, and religious practices. Migrants combine intergenerational learning, professional mentorship, and strategic recourse to faith, while simultaneously adapting to the transformations engendered by mechanisation. Their integration, therefore, does not rest solely upon individual competencies but on a complex assemblage of human, symbolic, and technical resources mobilised to stabilise their position within the market.

Yet a paradox emerges: while mechanisation optimises certain tasks, it simultaneously reconfigures labour relations and may marginalise traditional skills, creating a tension between modernisation and the valorisation of inherited competencies. Consequently, technical progress does not guarantee uniform integration and exposes some migrants to forms of precariousness despite their social and religious capital.

This situation gives rise to the research question: how do Malians simultaneously mobilise technology, skill transmission, and religious beliefs to structure their integration within a competitive market,

and what implications do these dynamics have for the sustainability and efficacy of their integration?

The scientific relevance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the interactions between technology, human capital, and symbolic rationalities in the urban African context, a domain that remains sparsely documented. From a social perspective, it sheds light on migrants' adaptive practices and strategies, providing insights for enhancing training, recognising traditional skills, and fostering community cohesion within strategic markets such as Port-Bouët.

Existing scholarship on the economic integration of migrants emphasises the crucial role of technology and evolving professional practices. Granovetter (1985) demonstrates that economic action is embedded within social networks, and that the diffusion of technical innovations reshapes labour relations and local hierarchies. Similarly, Castells (1996) highlights the impact of technologies on the reconfiguration of economic and social structures, emphasising that actors' adaptation to innovations conditions their integration. While these studies analyse diverse contexts, they offer limited insight into the specific combination of mechanisation and traditional skills within African urban markets.

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The transmission of practical skills emerges as a key factor in migrant integration. Bourdieu (1986) conceptualises cultural capital as a set of socially transmitted competencies and dispositions that shape access to economic positions. Coleman (1988) also underscores the significance of networks and intergenerational mentoring in professional training and economic integration. However, these analyses often focus on Western educational or professional contexts, leaving scant attention to mentorship and artisanal knowledge transmission within specific sectors of West Africa.

Religious beliefs and symbolic rationalities play a decisive role in structuring economic practices. Weber (1905) demonstrated how beliefs influence economic behaviour and resource mobilisation. Portes (1998) complements this perspective by emphasising that religious capital helps to organise communal solidarity and interpersonal trust, thereby reinforcing the social and economic integration of migrants. Nevertheless, few studies examine these dimensions in conjunction with mechanisation and intergenerational skill transmission in the African context.

This research distinguishes itself from previous work by adopting a qualitative, empirical approach focused on Malians within the Port-Bouët cattle sector, integrating the analysis of mechanisation, skill transmission, and religious strategies. It illuminates how these dimensions interact to consolidate migrants' economic and social integration, revealing adaptive logics and forms of community anchoring hitherto underexplored. In doing so, it enriches our understanding of human, social, and symbolic capital within a contemporary urban African milieu.

1. Theoretical and Methodological Anchoring

The study of the social dynamics underpinning the integration of Malians within the cattle sector at Port-Bouët drew upon multiple theoretical frameworks to apprehend the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation. Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of human and social capital facilitated the conceptualisation of how professional competencies, transmitted skills, and familial networks structure access to economic resources. In addition, Granovetter's (1985) theory of economic embeddedness illuminated the ways in which social relations organise and condition economic opportunities within an urban market. Finally, Weber's (1905) sociology of religion was employed to analyse the strategic deployment of beliefs and faith as both symbolic and practical resources in economic integration. The application of these theoretical perspectives proved highly pertinent, as they enabled an empirical linkage between mechanisation, intergenerational learning, and religious rationalities within the observed trajectories, thereby offering an integrated reading of migrants' adaptive strategies and processes of anchoring.

Methodologically, the study adopted a qualitative approach, combining semi-structured interviews with participant observation, in order to capture the complexity of professional, religious, and technological practices. The Port-Bouët abattoir was selected due to its strategic centrality within Abidjan's cattle market and its role as a site of dense interaction between Malian migrants and local actors. Participant selection criteria included tenure in the sector, experience with mechanisation, involvement in skill transfer, and participation in collective religious practices. A snowball sampling technique was employed to identify participants possessing in-depth knowledge of technological dynamics, skill transmission, and religious mobilisation. Semi-structured interviews elicited detailed data on learning strategies and integration processes, while participant observation documented quotidian practices, interaction with mechanisation, and religious rituals.

For analysis, data were processed using inductive thematic analysis, allowing the emergence of conceptual categories such as mechanisation and social adjustments, intergenerational mentorship, and religious rationalities mobilised for economic integration. This approach revealed that migrant integration is not solely a matter of individual action but results from a complex interplay between technology, skills, and beliefs, empirically confirming the relevance of the theoretical frameworks employed. It thus provides a nuanced, contextualised understanding of the logics underpinning social and economic anchoring within an African urban market.

2. RESULTS

2.1. Technologies, Labour Relations and Social Readjustments: The Impact of Mechanisation on the Integration of Malian Migrants within the Port-Bouët Cattle Sector

The study highlights the interplay between technologies, labour relations, and social integration dynamics, demonstrating that acceptance of and adaptation to technical innovations constitute a decisive factor in the stability and recognition of migrants within the cattle sector.

Field Observation: *"Since the machines clean the abattoir, it does not suit us; the machines, they do not work like a human."*

This statement reveals the tension between technological innovation and the socio-economic integration of Malian migrants at the Port-Bouët abattoir. The introduction of cleaning machines, perceived as a material advancement, is evaluated negatively by the workers: it disrupts established routines, alters the social and technical division of labour, and calls into question the legitimacy and valorisation of skills acquired through experience. The comment "they do not work like a human" indicates that machines fail to replicate the

gestures and practices of humans, which serve as carriers of symbolic capital and social recognition within the migrant community.

Mechanisation thus produces both symbolic and practical misalignments: it fragments employment opportunities and diminishes migrants' capacity to mobilise their skills and exercise control over the organisation of work, directly affecting their economic and social integration. Concurrently, it exposes a latent conflict between economic rationality and culturally embedded work values: human labour is valued not only for its productivity but also for its role in socialisation, solidarity, and the hierarchical structuring of groups.

Accordingly, this observation illustrates that migrants' integration in the cattle sector does not depend solely upon technical competence or individual initiative, but also upon their capacity to negotiate technological transformations, preserve symbolic and social capital, and adapt to changes reshaping the workplace. Mechanisation thus emerges as a lens through which power dynamics, recognition, and communal adaptation are revealed, where access to economic resources is intimately connected to historically constituted social and symbolic practices.

2.2. Transmission of Skills, Generational Hierarchies, and Integration Strategies of Malian Migrants within the Port-Bouët Cattle Sector

The investigation revealed that the integration of Malian migrants at the Port-Bouët abattoir results from a complex interplay between skill transmission, internal hierarchies, and communal strategies, wherein economic, symbolic, and social dimensions converge to ensure durable and structured integration.

Field Observation:

"The young Bélas are courageous; it is with them that we clean at the butchers'... When they drove people away to work at the abattoir, the young ones did not know how to manage; we were the first to start cleaning the market tables with the meat tubs... afterwards, we put the young Bélas to work there."

This testimony illuminates the logics of professional socialisation and the reproduction of skills within the Malian migrant community at the Port-Bouët abattoir. The respondent describes a process whereby experienced actors structure access to work for the "young Bélas" that is, newcomers or younger migrants through supervised, hands-on learning, which serves both as a vehicle for transmitting practical capital and as a mechanism for internal social regulation. The initial engagement of the experienced actors in cleaning the market tables and handling the meat tubs symbolises legitimacy through practice: only those who master the technical gestures and market routines acquire the authority to guide novices.

Economic integration is therefore not reducible to mere access to the market; it is embedded within a generational and communal hierarchy. Experienced migrants possess symbolic capital derived from their seniority and expertise, enabling them to control task allocation and the integration of newcomers. This system establishes an internal social order, wherein recognition and legitimacy are contingent upon the ability to master work routines and participate in collective dynamics.

Furthermore, the supervision of the "young Bélas" represents a collective strategy of social and economic reproduction: by initiating novices into market practices, the elders ensure the continuity of the Malian community's economic activities, reinforce internal solidarity, and maintain social cohesion in the face of market pressures and urban competition. This dynamic reveals that integration within the cattle sector depends as much on individual technical proficiency as on the appropriation of communal networks and implicit norms of cooperation.

Accordingly, the statement illustrates how Malian migrants deploy a dual logic of learning and hierarchy: practical skills are transmitted vertically, while market integration and social recognition are mediated through communal cohesion and the symbolic capital of the elders. Economic integration thus becomes inseparable from mechanisms of socialisation and community regulation, revealing the complexity of migrant anchoring strategies within a competitive urban and commercial environment.

2.3. Religion, Beliefs, and Economic Rationalities: The Role of Faith in the Integration of Malian Migrants within the Port-Bouët Cattle Sector

The study revealed that the integration of Malians within the Port-Bouët cattle sector does not depend solely upon economic competence or social networks; it is also mediated through religious beliefs, which structure economic rationality, foster resilience, and socially legitimise migrants' activities. Faith thus emerges as a central factor bridging economy, symbolic meaning, and social integration.

Field observation: *"It is thanks to GOD that every day I make (daily profits)."*

This statement underscores the pivotal role of the religious and symbolic dimension in the economic integration strategies of Malian migrants. It illustrates that commercial activity is not confined to a strictly rational or utilitarian logic, but operates within a universe of beliefs that shape perceptions of risk, profit, and social success.

The explicit recourse to God to account for daily success reveals a co-constitution of economic and religious practices. Religious belief functions as a mechanism for managing market uncertainties: it enables

migrants to ascribe meaning to their earnings, legitimise their labour, and maintain a sense of symbolic control within a frequently precarious and competitive work environment.

Faith also serves as a lever of resilience. By mobilising the transcendent dimension, migrants cultivate psychological and social capacity to withstand market fluctuations, persist in daily efforts, and sustain regularity in their economic integration. The religious dimension thus operates as an organising principle for economic routines, complementing the deployment of practical skills and social strategies.

Invoking God imbues daily profits with moral and symbolic value that exceeds mere economic calculation. It reinforces the worker's social legitimacy within the migrant community and reflects an integration of cultural and religious norms into the logic of gain. Success is not solely individual but embedded within a network of shared values, whereby economic achievement signals both piety and adherence to social and religious norms.

This testimony highlights that the integration of Malians in the Port-Bouët cattle sector rests upon a close interplay between economic practices and religious referents. Faith functions not merely as a moral justification but as a tool of orientation, resilience, and social legitimisation, structuring both market perception and integration strategies. The title thereby emphasises how religion, beliefs, and economic rationalities converge to shape the sustainable integration of migrants within a complex urban and commercial context.

3. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that mechanisation within the Port-Bouët cattle sector extends beyond a purely technical transformation; it profoundly reorganises labour relations and accentuates the value of migrants' human and social capital. This observation aligns with Granovetter's (1985) theory of embeddedness, which posits that economic actions are invariably situated within social networks. While mechanisation modifies work routines, it simultaneously reinforces the significance of artisanal skills and intergenerational transmission, emphasising that integration cannot be understood independently of pre-existing social relations.

Furthermore, the study highlights the strategic deployment of religious rationalities within economic and social organisation, corroborating Weber's (1905) analyses of the influence of beliefs on economic behaviour. Migrants mobilise faith not merely as a symbolic resource but also as a mechanism of trust and coordination within community networks. This dimension empirically validates Portes' (1998) perspective, which identifies social capital and communal norms as facilitators of economic integration.

A point of divergence, however, lies in the specific combination of mechanisation, artisanal skill transmission, and religious beliefs. Whereas classical literature often emphasises either the role of human and social capital or the effects of beliefs, few studies document these dimensions simultaneously within an African urban context and a defined economic sector. This study demonstrates that migrant success is situated at the intersection of these three dimensions, generating a form of communal anchoring and economic autonomy that transcends conventional Western analyses.

In summary, the results underscore that economic integration of migrants is not solely contingent upon mechanisation or individual competencies, but emerges from a complex interaction between social capital, intergenerational skill transmission, and religious rationalities. The discussion emphasises that the articulation of the employed theoretical frameworks embeddedness, social capital, and the sociology of religion proved entirely appropriate for interpreting the observed dynamics, while providing novel empirical insight into the technological and social adaptation strategies of migrants within strategic African urban markets.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the integration of Malian migrants within the Port-Bouët cattle sector cannot be apprehended merely as the acquisition of technical skills or the mechanical access to paid employment. The findings indicate that mechanisation within the sector does not simply alter production tools; it simultaneously reconfigures labour hierarchies, professional recognition logics, and the differentiated value of human and social capital. Integration trajectories are thus constructed at the intersection of economic, identity, and symbolic concerns, wherein the intergenerational transmission of skills plays a structuring role. The strategic deployment of religious beliefs, mobilised as resources of legitimisation, cohesion, and trust, emerges as a crucial mediating mechanism, linking learning, social embeddedness, and symbolic rationalities.

From a scientific perspective, this research contributes to the extension of capital theories by integrating the religious dimension alongside human and social capital, which are often treated separately in classical literature. It offers an integrated reading of technological adaptation dynamics and forms of community solidarity within an urban African context characterised by multiple interdependencies. The analysis also reveals that mechanisation generates not only economic effects but also reconfigures interaction networks, power relations, and collective regulatory mechanisms.

From a practical standpoint, the findings provide valuable insights for public policies on migrant

economic integration and the regulation of strategic markets, particularly regarding the securitisation of professional trajectories, collective resource management, and the organisation of productive chains. They highlight the need to conceive of employment beyond its purely remunerative dimension, incorporating professional socialisation mechanisms, communal regulatory structures, and logics of reciprocity.

At a geopolitical level, the study shows that migratory flows and transnational networks extend beyond economic mobility: they actively contribute to local socio-economic stability and the construction of community anchoring within urban environments characterised by competition for resources. These networks function as vectors for the circulation of knowledge, capital, and opportunities, while fostering resilience in the face of economic and institutional uncertainties.

The avenues opened by this research include intersectoral comparative analysis, to examine whether the mechanisms observed in the cattle sector are reproduced across other urban and peri-urban value chains. They also encompass the evaluation of the impact of technical innovations on social relations, hierarchy structuring, and the resilience of migrant communities.

In sum, this study offers a robust theoretical and empirical framework for reconceptualising economic integration not as a simple functional adjustment to the market, but as a multidimensional process, deeply socially embedded and symbolically mediated. It calls for moving beyond strictly economic approaches to incorporate the logics of interdependence, solidarity, and power that shape migratory trajectories and adaptation dynamics within African urban economies.

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