



UNIVERSITY OF
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MIGCHOICE COUNTRY REPORT: THE GAMBIA

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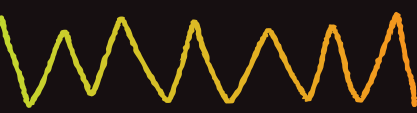
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In 2017, President Adama Barrow took over the leadership of The Gambia, after having ousted President Yaya Jammeh in the 2016 elections. Jammeh had been in power since the military coup of 22 July 1994. Diaspora networks played a significant role in the achievement of this result (Jaw 2017: 115-126). The end of Jammeh's regime ushered in a new phase in the history of the country with the dismantling of his apparatus of political repression, the redefinition of development policies, and a substantial renegotiation of partnerships with European institutions and other external donors. This historical conjuncture makes The Gambia different vis-à-vis Senegal and the Republic of Guinea (the other countries included in the MIGCHOICE project).

Over the last five years, the Gambian government has faced the challenge of establishing new guidelines for internal governance and international relationships. As President Barrow came to power, the EU announced, on February 2017, aid worth €225m; the country was virtually bankrupt at the time, owing in large part to economic mismanagement by the previous regime. In 2018, the EU mobilised additional international support totalling €1.45bn

through the International Conference for The Gambia ; Barrow also signed three cooperation agreements with China, as part of the “Belt and Road Initiative” , for Infrastructural development, economic and technical cooperation and culture. In 2020, China supported The Gambia in its management of the COVID 19 pandemic³. **During this post-dictatorship transition, migrations have evolved into a macro-political issue that challenges the internal legitimacy of the country's new leadership. On the one hand, the government has to respond to the legitimate aspirations to geographical and social mobility of younger generations. On the other hand, external relations with the European Union, international development agencies, donors and governments in the Global North significantly depend on the capacity to restrain young Gambians' attempts to travel the “backway”, the popular term through which irregular migrations to Europe have become known over the last twenty years. The Gambian government is also expected to participate in repatriation programmes⁴.**

Renewed cooperation with the EU has brought development interventions that target “return” and “potential” new irregular migrants. With a budget of €11m, The Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), which began in 2017 within the framework of the EU Trust Fund for Africa, aims to promote vocational training and offers grants for the establishment of small-sized enterprises. The EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration is a second EU Trust Fund supported programme to build up the capacities of government and local stakeholders in sustainable reintegration; it also provides reintegration assistance to return migrants . A landmark in recent Gambian efforts to engage actively in migration governance is the National Migration Policy (NMP), which the government officially launched in December 2020 . Its inspiring principle is the migration-development nexus: this means the increase of diaspora investment in the country, and the promotion of “skill development, funding opportunities and productive employment for Gambian youth” so as to counter the “backway”. Unlike the tradition of institutional engagement with its diaspora that Senegal has developed since the 1980s, the NMP marks the first steps of The Gambia in this direction. For almost twenty years, the repressive nature of the Jammeh's regime hindered coordination efforts among Gambians abroad, and kept their investment to the family level for fear of becoming visible in the public space. But the fact that the migration-development nexus remained on the margins of national concerns does not mean that it was unaddressed on a lower scale. This study casts light on the discourses, practices and representations that families, households

and communities have originated around the interlacement of migration and development across the last fifty years. Periods in which, during the second part of the 20th century, local communities benefitted from development interventions promoted by either the state or external donors were followed by phases characterised by the failure of existing projects or disconnection from external investments. These oscillations have led to the consolidation of values and practices that maximise the local opportunities for individual and collective well-being that either migration or development interventions may generate. Migration in particular has become the gateway to a bottom-up, dynamic and always under construction approach to development, which reframes the significance of development itself in relation to the experiences, histories and aspirations of the people involved in the process.

The starting point of the contemporary situation is in the 1950s, when a number of rural youths – engaged until then in different kinds of interregional mobility – reached Sierra Leone to work in the diamond-mining sector. In the same period, a developmental version of colonialism began to invest in the socio-economic improvement of the country through agricultural, educational and sanitary projects. While the Sierra Leone adventure was a first spontaneous experiment in development from below, which brought its pioneers to reinvest in their home country, post-World War II colonialism inaugurated a top-down approach to development that was to last up to the present. The future implementation of the Gambian NMP will meet the historicity of the migration-development nexus on the ground. Previous historical phases contributed to producing thick and heterogeneous repertoires of ideas, practices and values that imbue with meaning and organise people's expectations and practices of geographical mobility, as much as the management of the connections between local communities and the nodes of their diaspora. Individuals, families, households and communities have adapted and continue to adapt these repertoires to the challenges of present times in an effort to construct a path to development that responds to their social, moral and material needs. This study shows that the analysis of the migration-development nexus on the ground is a privileged entry point to contextualise decision-making processes on migrations, and understand the socio-cultural frameworks within which prospect and return migrants, as much as the people around them, formulate and justify their trajectories.



¹ European Commission Press Release (2018). EU mobilises international support for The Gambia. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_3865. Last accessed 19th May 2020.

² Gambia Government. (2018). The Gambia signs 3 cooperation agreements with China. Available at: <https://www.statehouse.gm/gambia-signs-3-cooperation-agreements-china>. Last accessed 24th February 2021.

³ Gassama, Momodou. (2020). Gambia receives support to contain spread of COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.afro.who.int/news/gambia-receives-support-contain-spread-covid-19>. Last accessed 24th February 2021.

⁴ Repatriations already occurred under Jammeh, with Gambians in Europe living in fear that they would be identified by officials of the National Intelligence Agency sent to support European countries' attempts at deportation. Numbers were nonetheless minimal. In 2018, Germany repatriated 300 Gambians amidst massive protests in The Gambia. The repatriation agreement that the new government had signed was put on hold. In November 2020, the arrival of 20 Gambians from Germany signalled its restart. Other repatriations of Gambian migrants from African countries along the “backway” (Niger, Algeria, Libya) had already started before 2016 under IOM programmes, and have increased over the past few years (Zanker and Altrogge 2017; Hultin and Zanker 2019; Zanker and Altrogge 2019).

⁵ For more on this support and other EU support to Gambia, see Gibril Faal (2020).

⁶ Sowe, Ndey. (2020). Gambia Launches First National Migration Policy. Available at: <https://foroyaa.net/gambia-launches-first-national-migration-policy/>. Last accessed 24th February 2021.

⁷ National Migration Policy, p.18.

1.1

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW



At Independence in 1965, The Gambia's prospects for development (and indeed, survival) were questionable (Rice 1968). A single cash crop, peanuts, dominated the economy. Amidst great doubts about the new nation's viability as a political and economic unit, Gambia's foreign and economic policies pursued two major objectives: to maintain independent sovereignty (especially within the context of a possible threat of assimilation by neighbouring Senegal) and attract foreign funding for development projects (Touray 2000; Ceesay 2006; Saine 2000). Early British financial support withered by the end of the 1960s, at a time when the great Sahelian droughts of 1968-1973, and the rise of oil prices in 1973-1974, halted dreams of growth and improved living conditions for the average Gambian (Nugent 2019: 404-411). While revenues were reducing because of crop failure, the country had to pay more for petroleum products and other imports (Wright 1997: 224). The government stepped into the place of the commercial companies (such as United African Company) that monopolised the colonial peanut trade. Its solution was to pay the farmers less than the peanut export price and to subsidise the price of imported rice for customers; this policy helped keep farmers concentrated on commercial crops, while meeting the rising needs of the urban areas. In 1968, the rising price for rice in the world market forced the internal price to rise as well. With all this, the Gambian economy continued to grow until the mid-1970s, due to the high prices that peanuts were obtaining on the world market. In spite of the decreasing production, by cutting the price paid to farmers, the government had a large foreign reserve and almost no debt. The need for economic diversification was nonetheless evident.

In the 1960s, by conceding a five-year monopoly to a Scandinavian tour operator (Davidson and Sahli 2015: 174), the government opened the country up to mass tourism. According to the Tourism, Culture and Hospitality Strategy Plan (2015-2020), before the COVID-19 pandemic the tourism sector contributed 12-16% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Other diversification initiatives concerned the fishing sector, traditionally used by coastal communities as part of their subsistence, in the course of the 1970s (Njie and Mikkola 2001), and horticulture in the following decade. Both were meant to respond to the growing needs of the expanding urban areas. If until the early 1970s, The Gambia had been a destination country for young people that tried to carve out a space in commercial peanut cultivation; the trend was now rapidly changing. As the agricultural sector had eased to work as a frontier of socio-economic emancipation, young Gambians were looking for salaried jobs in the capital city rather than working the land of their grandfathers and fathers. Some migrated to other African countries (or to the United Kingdom or the USA: both privileged destinations during this period). The 1980s were a difficult period with foreign aid becoming increasingly difficult to secure and shortages in food and fuel spreading from rural to the urban areas.

The focus on agriculture of the first National Development Plan in 1975 had culminated in 1982 in the establishment of a rice irrigation project at the Jahaly and Pacharr Smallholder Rice Development Project, involving 1,474 hectares in the Central River Division. In 1984, two years later, the project yielded its first harvest (Carney 1988; IFAD 1994). The expectation was that it would reduce the importation of rice: the project improved the life-style of the villages and households involved, but imported rice continued to play a key role in the daily life of average Gambians. Difficulties of commercialisation, and the impact of the late 1980s neoliberal reforms that removed public subsidies from agricultural inputs and crippled the infrastructure and management apparatus of the project, jeopardised the positive results of the first few years (Carney 2008).



The NDP had also an urban orientation: the number of educated young people was increasing, and their expectations of employment had to be met. The solution was to expand the ranks of the civil service. By favouring urban-based businessmen, the NDP also ushered in — through low import duties — re-export trade with Senegal, Mali and other countries that instead had higher tariffs for foreign goods (Wright 1997: 228-229)⁸. President Dawda Jawara and his party (the PPP — People's Progressive Party) promoted the establishment of urban-based state agencies, where appointments depended on patronage. While the urban businessmen were prospering, farmers had to bear the burden of these new developments. The only thriving rural communities were those with an interest in the Jahaly and Pacharr project. The government strategy keeping the buying price for peanuts low "led some [farmers] to grow food only for subsistence, or to sell their [peanuts] across the nearest border into Senegal, where more attractive prices prevailed in the stronger C.F.A. franc, or to join the growing numbers of unemployed in the capital" (Sallah 1990: 624).

⁸ Up to 1993, the re-export trade accounted for approximately 15% of GDP, 20% of fiscal revenue and 85% of all exports (Ceesay 2006). However, it has always been vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as intermittent border blockades by the Senegalese government or road transport unions, with a resultant tight squeeze on the Gambian economy.

Generalised dissatisfaction sparked the coup of 1981 (Hughes 1991: 105), which eventually failed after the Senegalese army intervened. Though peace was restored, the economic situation further deteriorated in the aftermath. "By early 1985, the government could not meet its debt-service obligations, the Central Bank could not guarantee the convertibility of the dalasi into foreign currency, and the country's inability to secure commercial credits resulted in domestic shortages of such essential commodities as rice, sugar, and petroleum. To make matters worse, a so-called 'parallel market' was diverting much business and badly needed scarce foreign exchange from the formal banking" (Sallah 1990: 628).

On advice of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the government launched the *Economic Recovery Programme (ERP)* at the end of 1985. The planned liberal reforms sought to introduce tighter fiscal and monetary policy in order to increase the country's international creditworthiness, enable debts and inflation reduction, and stabilise foreign exchange markets. They also aimed to liberalise exports, strengthen institutions, reduce budget deficits and rebuild the country's foreign currency reserves. When it finished in 1986, the ERP had met its objectives. External aid was once again secured (McPherson, Malcolm and Radelet 1995) but the day-to-day lives of average Gambians testified to its devastating impact. Following the ERP, a new policy, known as the Programme for Sustained Development (PSD) came into force between 1989 and 1994 to stabilise economic performance and create sustained growth. By the middle of that period, in 1992, the findings of an ILO-sponsored study indicated that almost 60% of Gambians lived below the poverty line. Critics of Jawara have described his system as a 'Sembocracy' (using the Mandinka word *sembo* that stands for 'power' or 'force') to describe the PPP's concealment of its authoritarian tendencies whilst maintaining the appearance of democracy (Sall and Sallah 1996). According to Momodou Loum (2002: 156) the political and social elites of the First Republic "used democracy, respect for human rights, and stability in the country as a cover for their exploitation of the patron-client networks. Access to the state's meagre resources rewarded loyalty to the PPP or to President Jawara. Members of the PPP elite became the primary beneficiaries of the state in both the public and private sectors." Their personal connections with government bureaucrats helped them to gain undeserved favours, such as untendered contract awards, employment in the civil service and in parastatal companies as well as scholarships for their family members. Jawara's strategy of distributing power and resources to both his loyal followers and political adversaries had helped maintain stability since the time of Independence, but had also proved unfavourable to the equal distribution of economic and social growth. The 1990s thus opened under the auspices of widespread socio-economic and political crisis: when Jawara decided to stand for the 1992 elections, a large number of young (and less young) Gambians felt betrayed. The horizon of change seemed blocked by the aging political elite and its aging supporters.

⁹ For a detailed examination of the 1981 coup, see Arnold Hughes (1991).

1.1.1 THE 1994 MILITARY COUP AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

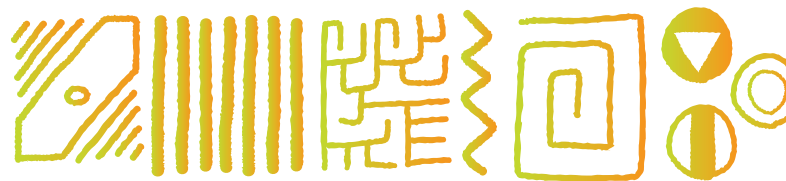
On July 22nd 1994¹⁰, young lieutenant Yahya Jammeh, together with other junior army officers, led a bloodless coup that overthrew Jawara and the PPP after twenty-nine years of rule. Jammeh and the military junta projected themselves as both a populist and reformists. They compensated for their lack of experience in government by seeking the support of groups and individuals not too closely identified with the former government. Not only did Lt. Jammeh express concern over the plight of Gambians, but he also promised to take pragmatic and concrete action to close the gap between the rich and poor. The noble tenor of his pronouncements and pledges enabled him to reach out to a broader constituency beyond the military: deeply frustrated by Jawara and the PPP, young people embraced the possibility of change. Under Jammeh's leadership, the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) had to counter the negative reaction of the international community. Following the coup, major western aid providers to the Gambia, such as the USA, Japan, UK and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), froze most of their development aid, and the EU cut half of its aid budget, while Kuwait and Saudi Arabia announced that they would continue to support the country. The new government started to seek alternative sources of aid and development funding with successful overtures to Taiwan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar¹¹, United Arab Emirates and Iraq¹². Jammeh also cultivated relations with Nigeria (although he had been highly critical of the Nigerian training mission in the country in 1994) and received a free tranche of 20,000 tonnes of Nigerian oil (reportedly in return for The Gambia's support for President Sani Abacha at the 30th Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in New Zealand in November 1995). An initial round of aggressive infrastructure development was undertaken in 1995, financed by a US\$35 million loan from Taiwan and another £10 million from Libya (Wiseman 1996). Under Jawara, The Gambia had only two government hospitals, both of which were a colonial legacy. There were few state-owned high schools, no universities or polytechnic colleges, and only about twenty health centres for its population of 1.2 million at the time. The ERP had blocked government investment in the maintenance and expansion of the road infrastructure. As part of the AFPRC project, two new high schools, five middle schools, a large hospital in Farafenni, and several rural clinics were built. The national radio station was refurbished, and the construction of the new airport started, together with that of the first university and television station. During the 1996 presidential election that marked the return to democracy, Jammeh used all these development projects as campaign rhetoric: the country was moving forward, and people should join his efforts to build a modern, dynamic and globalised nation. In the four subsequent elections, he kept celebrating the investments made in infrastructural development as evidence of his success story and often resorted to the carrot and

¹⁰ For a very useful account of 1994 coup and the transition period, see Ebrima Ceesay (2006).

¹¹ Jammeh opened a Gambian Embassy in Qatar for the first time during the transition period.

¹² Playing an "Islamic card", in the summer of 1995, Jammeh inaugurated a mosque in the grounds of State House, Banjul (even though The Gambia is notionally a secular state). He flew the Imam of Mecca from Saudi Arabia to perform the initial ceremonies. Jammeh was cultivating financial support and good will from all rich Arab and Gulf States.

stick approach with voters, particularly rural ones, threatening to keep his so-development projects away from areas thought to be sympathetic to the opposition. Launched in October 2018, The Gambia's Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC), has heard countless testimonies about the grave crimes committed by either him or his acolytes during 22 years in office: extrajudicial killings and murder, enforced disappearance, torture and rape. Similarly, through the analysis of hundreds of documents, in March 2019 the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) laid bare the extent of his government's corruption. In a statement released to the public under the caption "*The Great Gambia Heist*"¹³, OCCRP revealed that "Jammeh orchestrated the embezzlement of nearly US\$1 billion of public funds and illegal timber revenue during his 22-year rule, looting the treasury in a long-running conspiracy that crippled one of the world's poorest countries". The documents, according to OCCRP, show how Jammeh hijacked government funds and departments, set up private accounts at the central bank, and built a patronage network while ruling the country through a combination of guile, unbridled power, and violence. Likewise, the Surahata Janneh Commission of inquiry into the corruption of former President Yahya Jammeh found that he looted at least \$363 million of public funds.



1.2

JAMMEH AND THE "BACKWAY"

Although the history of external mobility in The Gambia dates back to the 1950s, international migrations gained traction during the critical juncture of the 1980s. During this period, the social figure of the "semester", who spends a part of the year in Europe and comes back during the holidays, often accompanied by his wife and children, became popular in the coastal localities most affected by mass tourism. The protagonists were young men who capitalised on the relationships they built with north-European visitors to migrate to Scandinavia, especially Sweden (Wagner and Yamba, 1986). Libya also played a role as a favourite destination for urban and rural youths without established social networks that could support their plans to move to either Europe or the United States. By the time of the 1994 coup, different and ranked regimes of mobility had consolidated over the years: seasonal mobilities between the rural and the urban areas, and from Gambia to Senegal (and vice versa); migrations to other African countries, such as Angola; households of the upper river or the north bank, whose youths had pioneered migrations to Sierra Leone during the 1950s, had reached the second or third generation of international migrants; others were taking early steps in this direction. Apart from the children of the elite who could move freely thanks to the socio-economic and political capital of their families, the rest of Gambians strove to carve out their own opportunities to travel. An invitation from a relative or a friend already abroad could pave the way to Spain and other southern European countries, but also to the United Kingdoms and Germany with the expectation of finding opportunities for regularisation once in place.



¹³ OCCRP 2019. "The Great Gambia Heist". Available at: <https://www.occrp.org/en/greatgambiaheist/>. Last accessed 10th May 2020.

¹⁴ Data reported by the UNHCR Operational Portal Refugee Situations. Available at: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean> Last accessed 25th March 2021.

Under Jammeh, the diasporisation of Gambian society was further exacerbated. Immediately after the coup, a large number of young people welcomed the change in a renewed spirit of generational agency. But as his regime was consolidated, disillusion mounted again. Throughout the 2000s, as political repression peaked after attempted coups or during the electoral process (and all opportunities for social advancement came to be directly or indirectly linked to support to Jammeh's regime), the exit-option through migration penetrated young imaginaries of self-realisation and practices of socio-economic empowerment vis-à-vis political elites, elders and family heads. Through the lexicon of 'Babylon' and the 'nerves syndrome', young people gave voice to their frustrated aspirations to achieve social recognition and wellbeing through geographical mobility in a time in which the immigration policies of both Europe and the United States were becoming increasingly restrictive (Gaibazzi and Bellagamba 2009). The Canary Islands migration "crisis" of 2005-2006 sanctioned the official beginning of the "backway". By this time, cell phones were spreading over the country, money transfers had definitively overcome older ways to support families at home, and the euro, more than the traditional British sterling or American dollar, was becoming the most sought-after foreign currency. Thanks to Jammeh's investments in road construction, internal mobility was improving. Together with the consolidation of a rhizomatous socio-economic "infrastructure" that through various roads, nodes and steps assisted all those who could not get a visa to attempt an entry into the European Union, all these changes drove the mobility aspirations of young Gambians, as much as the first efforts of European countries to engage the Gambian government in the repatriation programmes and migration control.



1.2 JAMMEH AND THE "BACKWAY"



1.3

RECENT TRENDS AND PATTERNS OF MIGRATION

The Gambia National Development Plan (2018-2021: 238), combining official data from foreign countries about residents, asylum seekers and second- or third-generation Gambians, reports an estimated Gambian diaspora of 200,000 individuals. Available data show that the first decade of the 2000s marked a sharp increase in the "backway". In the early 2010s, C. Omar Kebbeh (2013) noted that "the number of Gambians living abroad increased from approximately 35,000 in 2000 to approximately 65,000 in 2010" (though some estimates quote up to 90,000). After 2011, the growing importance of the Central Mediterranean Route through Libya for Sub Saharan migration to Europe saw more Gambians use it. The peak was in 2016 when 11,929 Gambians arrived in Italy by sea, representing a 41% increase compared to 2015. Until 2019, The Gambia was amongst the top 10 countries of origin of migrants who arrived in Europe without regular visas, with roughly 40,000 entries since 2014 (Faal 2020: 3). Although 2020 saw the renewed vitality of the oceanic route from West Africa to the Canary Islands, during the past two years Gambian arrivals in Europe have drastically decreased: only 199 reached Italy between January 2020 and February 2021¹⁴.

As shown by the annual rate of urban expansion, internal migration is also a significant phenomenon with visible effects. The 2013 Gambian Census (The Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013) reported that there were 321,783 internal migrants, that rural urban migration mostly affected regions such North Bank and was directed to the coastal districts of the Kanifing and Brikama urban areas. A study conducted in 2018-2019 by IOM The Gambia in ten different Gambian communities showed that internal migration peaked between 2010 and 2018 (IOM 2019: 29-30). The coastal urban areas host an estimated 62.6% of the country's population and the annual rate of urbanisation is 4.07% (Faal 2020: 29).



2.1

BAKAU



Bakau is a large town of around 30,000 inhabitants located in the Kanifing Municipality, Greater Banjul area (The Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013). It hosts international organisations such as the Medical Research Council Unit The Gambia and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as hotels and restaurants for tourists. The town is roughly divided into an older part, Bakau Old Town, and the more recent settlement of Bakau New Town. Bakau Old Town, according to oral history, was established roughly three hundred years ago. It consists of different kunda, i.e. areas associated with clusters of households interlinked by genealogical ties. Kunda are ranked according to their history of settlement, with first-settlers enjoying political and social leadership over late-comers. Early population movements are important because subsequent waves of immigrants followed the paths already established by kin and acquaintances: mobility required a host under whose protection the newcomer put himself. The more recent neighbourhood of “New Town” grew after the 1960s, when civil servants, businessmen and the middle-class began to leave the overcrowded neighbourhoods of the capital city, Banjul. Huge hotels and residential complexes for tourists occupy a large part of the area of Bakau known as Cape Point. Local residents often refer to their town as a “developed area” and note the local economic relevance of tourism, which in their own terms they call “the industry” or “our industry”. For Bakau people, “the industry” is the major vector of development as it has opened the town to transnational socio-economic relationships. The resource to exploit – and to protect from outsiders – is the possibility of creating personal relationships with tourists. Local guides live off these relationships and try to turn them into long-lasting bonds of affection and collaboration that become a source of regular donations and business partnerships. Until the 1960s, Bakau was a predominantly agricultural and fishing community.



As underlined by the Alkalo (the village head), land for farming reduced drastically after the 1960s:

“

IF YOU LOOK AT PEOPLE OF MY AGE [THE INTERVIEWEE WAS BORN IN THE LATE 1950S] FARMING WAS THE ONLY SOURCE OF INCOME, AND FISHING. [...] BY 1992, THE GOVERNMENT HAD TAKEN ALL OUR FARMLANDS [...], RICE, GROUNDNUT, MILLET. THE AREA AROUND THE INDEPENDENCE STADIUM CONSISTED OF FARMLANDS AND OUR FAMILY HAD THE BIGGEST CASHEW ORCHARDS IN BAKAU. THE GOVERNMENT WIPED THEM ALL OUT FOR RESIDENTIAL PURPOSES. [...] AND THIS CONTINUED... WHEN YAYA JAMMEH CAME, EVERY PIECE OF LAND BELONGED TO HIM.

In the mid-2010s, Jammeh's government attempted to destroy one of the last agricultural assets of the community, the women's gardens located near the Radio Gambia station. Precedence accorded by the President to other predatory confiscations interrupted the process. Bakau's proximity to the capital city and the great market area of Serrekunda have turned horticulture into a profitable activity. Bakau women engaged with gardening created their first kafo (i.e. association) in 1985. In 1989, this kafo became the first horticulture cooperative in The Gambia and applied to the Gambia Cooperative Union for a loan to fence the land under cultivation. The association received additional funding from the British High Commission, the American Embassy and UNDP, which assisted in the construction of wells and fences and provided agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilisers and tools). In the late 1980s, the Royal Norwegian Society for Rural Development provided additional technical and financial support (Nyborg and Manneh 1990).

The beach is another important element of Bakau's infrastructure and community life. Since the origin of the settlement, fishing had been an activity of paramount importance, but today most of the facilities are semi-abandoned. In 1987, Bakau was included in a national project called Artisanal Fisheries Development Project, funded by the European Union and aimed at increasing productivity and employment opportunities in the fishing sector in The Gambia (Njie and Mikkola 2001). The Japanese International Cooperation Agency sponsored the construction in Bakau of docks, several stores, an ice plant and facilities for smoking fish. They are now in ruin, but since 2018, when the local authorities decided to lease the main building to a Gambian company, a rehabilitation programme has started. For many Bakau residents, fishing is an under-exploited resource because of political mismanagement and lack of organisation among the people involved in this sector.

¹⁵ Interview of 27 January 2020, Bakau.



22

GUNJUR

Gunjur is a village located in the South Kombo district, with a population of about 17,000 inhabitants according to the 2013 national census (The Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013). The village is a cluster of smaller settlements distributed over a large area that stretches from the Atlantic coast to the interior. Two important highways intersect in Gunjur. One is the coastal road linking Gunjur to the rapidly expanding urban area of Kanifing. The other is the road leading to Brikama, the regional capital of the Lower Government area. Brikama is also an extremely important outlet for the agricultural and fishing products of Gunjur. The villagers consider these two roads to be one of the few positive legacies of the former president Jammeh's regime.



Gunjur is polycentric: in addition to the old core of the village and the harbour, several other concentrations of residential buildings are separated by farmlands and scraps of secondary bush. About 20 tourist lodges are available, many of which belong to foreign investors. The beach hosts one of the biggest fishing harbours of The Gambia. Dozens of ocean pirogues unload their daily catch in Gunjur. A Chinese plant (Golden Lead) produces fishmeal and, since its opening in 2016, has triggered intense reactions and discussions among local residents, according to whom the factory has impacted negatively on local fishing activities by absorbing large portions of the catch. In addition, air pollution and the spilling of wastewater directly onto the beach are affecting the economy and the life of Gunjur's community. Some residents also claim that the Chinese company did not meet the agreements originally made with local authorities for the recruitment of local labour. The committee of harbour workers, on the contrary, emphasises the positive impact of the Chinese plant. Over the last four years, it has attracted numerous fishermen from Senegal and other Gambian ports and has transformed Gunjur into one of the most important fishing harbours in the entire country.

Local residents identify agriculture and fishing as the most important sectors of Gunjur's economy. Originally, it was commercial groundnut farming, mostly practiced by men. As with many other areas of the country, this sector's decline dates back to the 1970s when horticulture, mostly practised by women, started to rise instead. Women cultivators are fully integrated into commercial networks: numerous suppliers visit the village regularly and bring fruit and vegetables to the important nearby markets of Brikama and Serrekunda. Development projects have played an important role in the village; three community gardens sponsored by the Government of The Gambia and The World Bank are currently active in Gunjur and are equipped with boreholes and electric pumps. Land is a key issue. Gunjur's location on the fringes of the coastal urban expansion of the Gambia means that local residents have to cope with expanding land acquisition by "external" capital (real estate agencies; rich diaspora members; government officials and businessmen). Land available for cultivation is shrinking and land disputes are increasing.

23

MANSAJANG

Located on the southern border of the town of Basse, in Basse Fuladu East district, Upper River Region, Mansajang has a population of around 2,600 inhabitants (The Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013). It is the first site of settlement in the history of Basse itself. Created in the late part of the 19th century by Fula herders who were in search of pasture and access to water for their cattle, Mansajang became the site of some administrative headquarters in the colonial period. The present-day town of Basse began to develop at the end of the nineteenth century when Wolof traders hailing from Bathurst – the original name of Banjul – reached the area in order to buy groundnuts from native farmers.

The northern part of the village is occupied today by government buildings, warehouses used by the villagers for storing the harvest after the rainy season, and the guesthouses that banks and other commercial institutions use for their visitors and staff from the capital city. The highway beside the village, refurbished in 2015, leads to the Senegalese town of Velingara and to other important regional markets in Senegal, Guinea-Bissau and the Republic of Guinea. Mansajang's location is strategic at the interregional level. The refurbishment of highways has impacted economically on village development; because the space available for expanding residential facilities is almost used up, the value of land close to the roads is increasing. Local residents are coping with these circumstances by experimenting with ways of using land other than for agriculture and animal husbandry, and this affects the relationships between people at both the village and the household level, where conflicts among the different family units in the same household abound.

Mansajang hosts old and prestigious educational institutions. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, St. George School has provided primary education. In 1983, the first high school in the entire region was built in the village. Three major neighbourhoods can be identified. Baldeh Kunda is where most of the compounds belonging to members of the Baldeh first settlers are concentrated. Today almost all of it is occupied: the only possible direction of expansion for this section of the village is the farmlands located on the southern side the main residential area. These farmlands also host the cattle fields during the dry season. Jambang Kunda neighbourhood is where the Mandinka blacksmiths who provided their services to the Baldeh originally settled. Finally, Angle Futa is home to settlers from the Fouta Djallon highlands of Guinea. This immigration has a long history; in the two decades after Gambian independence the persecutions that the Fouta Djallon Fula suffered under the dictatorial regime of Sekou Touré (1958-1984) intensified and the area of Basse, where other fula-speaking people lived, provided them sanctuary. People from Fouta usually arrived as seasonal agricultural hands. Those who decided to stay were assigned a specific area on the western border of the village.





Agriculture and livestock are of vital importance for Mansajang, but not all residents engage in this kind of activity. The Baldeh are the major cattle-owners, as herding is their traditional economic activity. Members of other ethnic groups engage in husbandry as well but, according to local residents' estimations, there are around 1,000 head of cattle concentrated in the hands of 30% of the population of the village. Some villagers belonging to non-Fula groups obtained farmland from the first settlers in more distant areas located outside the original belt of farmlands surrounding the village.

Transnational migration is an old phenomenon in the village. Elderly men now in the village worked in Libya during the 1980s. During the same period, young people started also to move to Europe (mostly to Spain and Germany) and worked there for years. In a way that is comparable to the other rural communities of the upper river, different generations of international migrants coexist.



JAHALY-PACHARR

Jahaly-Pacharr is a large area, occupied by several villages, in the Lower Fuladu West district in Central River Region. The name is that of the development project, which since the late 1970s has transformed the swampy lands by the river, originally dedicated to traditional rice cultivation during the rainy season, into irrigated parcels for commercial rice production. The village of Jahaly marks the western border of the area involved in the project, while Pacharr is the eastern fringe. The Jahaly-Pacharr cluster of villages is inhabited by different ethnic groups heterogeneously distributed. They form a network of interdependent and complementary activities sustained by the circulation of people and economic resources on a daily basis.

In the last four decades, the expansion of settlement in the Jahaly-Pacharr area has concentrated around the highway; Brikama Ba has become the biggest village and the business centre of the area. The commercial development of this Mandinka settlement has attracted representatives of other ethnic groups (Fula, Serrahule, Wolof). Numerous shops, artisan workshops and business activities in Brikama Ba are owned by people coming from the neighbouring villages with a limited number of commercial activities. Brikama Ba's role as economic frontier is also related to the fact that every Saturday it hosts a Lumo, a temporary weekly market. The Lumo started in 1984, corresponding with the initial successful phase of the Jahaly-Pacharr project, when production was rapidly expanding. The Brikama Ba's Lumo is a vital commercial outlet for local agricultural products such as rice, groundnuts and vegetables.



Agriculture is a fundamental economic asset in this part of the Gambia. The economic interdependence of the Jahaly-Pacharr area depends on rice cultivation and is one of the legacies of the Jahaly-Pacharr development project, which became operational between 1981 and 1983 with a core contribution from the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Initially only five villages were included but the project rapidly expanded. In the late 1980s, more than 2,000 households and 1,500 hectares were involved. In the early 1990s, the project entered a long period of decline, which resulted in the deterioration of the irrigation infrastructure, tractors and other mechanical equipment, and of the quality of the managerial apparatus. In the early 2000s, a new project sponsored by the Taiwanese government implemented the change from artificial to tidal irrigation. The most remarkable consequence of the crisis in the project was a drastic decrease in the productivity of rice fields. In addition to rice cultivation, all the communities of Jahaly-Pacharr area have always produced other crops, especially groundnuts and millet. These farmlands are mostly located in the territories south of the highway and the residential cores of the villages. According to our interlocutors, land for both agriculture and settlement is still abundant in the area. Jahaly, Madina Nfaily and Brikama Ba have been differently affected by migration over the years. The first two are Serrahule, with a long history of transnational migration; their diaspora network has sustained a regular outflow of young people to Europe over the last decades. The “backway” has instead affected Brikama Ba, especially after the military coup of 1994. The height of political repression and economic hardship under former President Jammeh, between 2006 and 2016, saw a massive departure of youth attempting to reach Europe by the Central Mediterranean route through Libya. Young men and women have also relocated to the coastal areas in search of employment and economic opportunities.

Kerewan is located in the Lower Baddibu district, in the North Bank Region. It is the regional capital with roughly 300 households and 4,600 inhabitants (The Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013) mostly concentrated in one compact settlement, cut across the east-west axis by the North Bank highway. Kerewan is half way between the coastal town of Barra (which is linked to Banjul by ferry) and the important business centre of Farafenni. Village youths are actively engaged in development (and politics) through local organisations and the Gambian National Youth Council. They play an important role in the implementation of development projects that target young people in the North Bank Region, such as the Youth Empowerment Project and ‘Make it in The Gambia – Tekki Fii’. Funded by the European Union Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), this second project is an initiative of the Government of The Gambia to enable young people to gain empowerment by tapping economic opportunities in the country rather than going abroad through irregular migration .

A fundamental step in the infrastructural history of the entire region was the construction of the bridge over Jowara Creek in the early 2000s. The creek runs just beside Kerewan. The bridge re-shaped both the village’s internal distribution of business activities and economic relationships at the regional level. When the boats linked Kerewan to the road to Barra, the banks of the Jowara Creek were a commercial site. All business activities are today concentrated inside Kerewan instead. According to local residents, the bridge benefitted the growing settlements of Barra and Farafenni more than Kerewan. The entire North Bank region has vital social and economic connections with both the coastal urban areas and Senegal. These are the main markets for local agricultural products. A large part of commercial activity on the North Bank is concentrated near the Senegalese border.

Kerewan is an agricultural settlement long involved in migration. In addition to groundnuts, millet and rice, market gardens are extremely important. Richard Schroeder (1999) documented the expansion of the horticulture sector from the 1980s to the 1990s. Programmes sponsored by international organisations provided the resources to build infrastructures and buy tools. The construction of fences and wells and the distribution of agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilisers sharply increased the number of women involved in gardening and the area of land under cultivation. The absence of stores and food-processing facilities and the lack of organisation of the market chain are the main factors that undermine the full exploitation of Kerewan’s commercial potential. The local women sell to buyers who come to the village from Senegal or from urban markets. They also go to the weekly Lumos of the North Bank region but, in order to sell their entire stock of perishable goods, they are often forced to accept very low prices. Migration is an omnipresent topic of discussion in Kerewan, more than in the other four field research sites. People in every age group spontaneously raise the importance of the different kinds of geographical mobility that have shaped the village’s economy and social life. During the dry season, temporary migration to the Greater Banjul area is an extremely common phenomenon. Each village household has a long history of international migration, and since the early 2010s has seen its young members venturing along the “backway”.



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KEREWAN





A thorough analysis of the available literature on the history of migration and development in The Gambia, including academic contributions, media contents, government documents and reports produced by international organisations, provided the data baseline for historical and anthropological research at the five research sites in the first three months of 2020. Over 90 people were interviewed in depth. This activity was accompanied by participant observation of everyday forms of interaction in leisure, work and public circumstances. In line with recent approaches to the theorisation of mobility (Carling and Collins 2018: 911), the focus was on the social embedment of actual or potential migration trajectories. A solid network of local contact persons, who knew the scope and objectives of the research and continued to provide updates, information and feedback, helped to overcome the challenge posed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The specificity of each of the five sites was addressed through context-oriented research strategies. For instance, the Jahaly-Pacharr area is a heterogeneous and socio-economically integrated network of rural villages. Here the research focused on eliciting local memories of development interventions and mobility patterns through interviews with the elders of different villages and Ministry of Agriculture officers based in the area. In Kerewan, it relied on the network of young activists and civil society organisations active in the area, while in Mansajang the support of young members from the different village neighbourhoods helped address patterns of internal differentiation. At all the five sites, the objective was to reach an in-depth understanding of local perspectives on the migration-development nexus and of the processes of mobility decision-making, as understood and represented by young people and a variety of other subjects (migrants' family members, local authorities, young activists, return migrants, elderly people, businessmen, members of associations, mothers and young women, intellectuals, politicians and civil servants). The key concepts used in the analysis – "family", "household", "community", "networks" – deserve some contextualisation. Families in the Gambia are descent groups stemming from common agnatic ancestors; they are usually described as "extended" in order to highlight their social latitude as aggregates of different generations of people linked by kin ties but also by practices of adoption and interpersonal allegiances. Families are then localised into households that are fluid agglomerates of residential units (Mandinka: sinkiroo, literally: kitchen) that share economic resources and consumption. In the urban areas, the household and the residential unit often coincide. In the villages, households are made up of several large compounds, the more recent ones resulting from the growth and splitting of the original household. The solidity of the relationships between the residential units that form a household are extremely variable. As lived

realities, these sociological abstractions must be seen as fields of social action that stem out of a constant work of social composition: conflicts, tensions, and misunderstandings are the stuff out of which the household emerges as a historically consistent field of interaction.

A "community" is a spatially and socially defined settlement. It may refer to a village, but also to clusters within the same village, such as the neighbourhoods of Mansajang, each associated with a specific phase in the history of the settlements. In all the five research sites, foundation histories were crucial. The status of first-settlers has political implications that throughout history have been negotiated and renegotiated in relation to the management of local human and natural resources and the broader political framework: the kingdoms and chieftaincies of the nineteenth century, the colonial and independent state, Jammeh's regime. The Alkaloship, i.e. the institution of the village head, is usually a prerogative of the first settlers. Communities are fluid: their internal arrangements are always in the making through negotiations between their historical legacy and current situation. In some communities, such as Gunjur, the several households are part of one extended family (Mandinka: kabilo) whose members acknowledge a common genealogical origin or a link of affiliation that actuates participation in decision-making process over important assets (such as the allocation or sale of unoccupied portions of land). In other contexts, especially in large communities made up of different categories of settlers, the kabilo is weak or absent and the units that really influence the socio-political life are the largest and most prominent households, which struggle to retain their position of leadership. Families, households and communities must be understood in terms of dynamic fields of social interaction, economic support and socio-political initiative. Networks bring individuals together in shifting coalitions of collaboration and solidarity that create an infrastructure of support. Establishing, cultivating, and defending the relationships and exchanges between families, households, communities and their diasporas is a crucial process. Fission and fusion are continuously ongoing. Households may split due to internal conflicts and keep splitting into completely separated economic clusters that do not share any form of moral or economic support. The expansion or shrinking of solidarity networks is always contentious. Dormant kin ties may be reactivated and materialise in the constitution of a new infrastructure of support. At the village level, political actors are constantly engaged in the creation and difficult maintenance of new platforms of collaboration to manage the relationships with the diaspora. These experiments may fail or consolidate. Certainly, they generate tensions as much as shared conceptions and practices of local development.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the inter-generational and gendered hierarchy in Mandinka households in The Gambia see Pamela Kea (2013).



4.1

DEVELOPMENT FROM BELOW

Development interventions and geographical mobility are interlaced in the history of Bakau and the other field sites. Migration has long been an instrument to promote the material wellbeing of families and, thanks to the coordination of community members through platforms and associations that involve the diaspora, it has become a fundamental tool for local development. The case of the village of Brikama Ba in the Jahaly-Pacharr area is a good example of this. Here, the village has reappropriated and adapted development projects designed and promoted by international agencies and government authorities according to local representations and practices oriented towards increasing the people's wellbeing. The Alkalo of Brikama Ba, while talking about his community, emphasised population growth and the construction of new compounds as signs of village development¹⁷. This phase started in the early 1980s and coincided with business expansion in Brikama Ba, which in turn consolidated its commercial inclination amidst the rural communities of the area. The Jahaly-Pacharr project played a crucial role in this dynamic. It started in 1983 thanks to a loan provided by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), as well as the support of other international agencies and national governments (Carney 1988; IFAD 1994). The goal of the project was to increase rice production in the area through government support for (and control of) every phase of rice cultivation: land allocation, input supply, irrigation and marketing. According to the chairperson of the Village Development Committee (VDC)¹⁸, the project management called every compound head and assigned him the usufruct of a portion of land for rice cultivation based on the number of women in his family. The project provided farmers with access to seeds, fertilisers, herbicides and farming machines. The construction of seven pumps and a network of canals enabled the use of River Gambia for both artificial irrigation and water drainage. In the mid-1980s, Brikama Ba and other villages in the Jahaly-Pacharr area had rice in abundance. According to the people, the government could not buy all the rice produced. In the first five years, the production surplus was tremendous. Outsiders joined the local labour force en masse. Many hailed from Guinea-Bissau and the Casamance, and were largely concentrated in Brikama Ba. According to a senior officer at the Sapu agricultural station, the majority of these workers were Jola from Casamance, already accustomed to rice cultivation, who had fled the tensions stirred up by the beginning of the Casamance rebellion in the 1980s¹⁹. Usually they received 30 kilograms of rice for every day of work (from 8 am to 4 pm). After each harvest, the villages

¹⁷ Interview of 14 March 2020, Brikama Ba.

¹⁸ Interview of 14 February 2020, Brikama Ba.

¹⁹ Interview of 14 March 2020, Sapu.



of the area crawled with cars and big trucks, which the migrant workers used to transport home the huge amounts of rice they had accumulated. The rapid saturation of the local market made it extremely difficult to convert the rice surplus into money or other goods. Sometimes, even the payment of farm hands, family consumption (usually not more than five bags every four months) and generous donations to relatives living in the coastal areas of The Gambia could not absorb the previous harvest stocks. Huge amounts of rice were thus spoiled. The initial successful phase of the Jahaly-Pacharr project affected Brikama Ba significantly. Until the early 1980s, it was a small village concentrated around the area of the main mosque.



WHEN THE PROJECT STARTED YOU SAW PEOPLE COMING FROM OTHER AREAS... REGIONS... COMING TO SETTLE HERE. WHEN YOU HAD A MIGRANT WORKER, YOU WENT TO THE COMMITTEE [THE VILLAGE COMMITTEE THAT IN THE EARLY 2000S WILL BE RENOMINATED VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE] AND SAID: "THIS IS MY "STRANGER", HE WANTS TO STAY HERE; NOW, YOU HAVE TO GIVE HIM SOME LAND". SO WE GAVE THEM THE LAND FOR FREE, WITHOUT COST. [...] JUST AS WITH THE KOLA NUTS, THEY GAVE LAND TO BUILD A HOUSE AND LAND TO FARM. YOU WENT TO THE PROJECT COMMITTEE AND THEY ALSO GAVE YOU A PLOT [FOR RICE CULTIVATION]. [...] SO YOU SEE, THEY GAVE YOU ALL THESE FACILITIES AND THEN, IN OUR CULTURE, WE TREAT INCOMERS AS FAMILY MEMBERS. [...] THE PEOPLE WHO LODGED YOU, AND THOSE YOU GAVE THE KOLA NUTS TO, YOU BECAME PART OF THEIR FAMILY.²¹

The Alkalo specified that the migrant worker could not alienate the land allotted to him: he could use it freely only as long as he was in the village²². The final step in his assimilation process was intermarriage with local settlers. Through this dynamic, Brikama Ba had a quick and remarkable urban expansion and, according to the chairperson of the VDC, the village's first settlers became a small nucleus.



The interview extract above helps to explain how local idioms, indicators and repertoires of practices of resource exploitation mediated the impact on the community of the 1980s rice development scheme. In the absence of marketing opportunities, the local community capitalised on the rice surplus generated by the project by applying local ideas and practices of "development". For the people, development meant demographic increase and the construction of new compounds. The consolidation of new relationships with the strangers who came, settled and became part of the descent groups was part of a system of historically inherited socio-economic practices that structured local discourses on individual and collective wellbeing. The people of Brikama Ba used immigration to adapt the predicament of the project itself (i.e. the shortcomings of the rice market chain) to a localised development agenda.

The chairperson of the VDC stated that in the 1990s there were the first few cases of transnational migration from the village to Europe, especially to Scandinavian countries and Germany. The migrants all travelled regularly because they did not need visas at that time. The cousin of one of our interlocutors went to Germany, and still lives there. This first limited migration wave coincided with a significant influx of transport vehicles; the migrants managed to ship to The Gambia old vans which they bought in Germany and which were transformed into *gele gele*, i.e. the transport vehicles that constantly run between and connect the coastal urban settlements and rural villages. The increasing availability of vehicles made better connections and reduced transport costs possible within the Jahaly-Pacharr area and between the latter and Kombos²³. According to the chairman of the VDC, Jammeh's coup inaugurated a period of uncertainty and economic decline for the settlement, the consequences of which mostly affected the local youth²⁴. He declared that Jammeh always considered Brikama Ba to

²⁰ The gift of kola nuts is a customary practice that symbolises the request of goods and services and establishes a patronage relationship between two parts. For instance, it mediates the access to land for people who settled in a village but also the request from a would-be apprentice to a master-employer.

²¹ Interview of 14 February 2020, Brikama Ba.

²² Interview of 14 March 2020, Brikama Ba.

²³ Interview of 16 February 2020, Brikama Ba.

²⁴ Interview of 14 February 2020, Brikama Ba.

be an opposition town and did everything he could to exclude it from development interventions²⁵. Jammeh publicly declared in front of the local residents that they would see the electricity passing over their heads without having it. The chairman also reported that the removal of some senior managers hailing from Brikama Ba from their public posts dismayed the local population. There was the case of a manager of the national radio working in Basse who, after returning from holidays, found his place occupied by a member of the Jola group (the president's ethnic group) and eventually resigned; there were also other cases of senior and high-ranking employees of international agencies who were replaced after pressure from the government.

Jammeh's rule, since the beginning, coincided with widespread disillusion among young people. This phase also coincided with the irreversible deterioration of the Jahaly-Pacharr Project, and thus with the decrease of both production capabilities and rice yield. The chairperson of the VDC noted that the first significant wave of young men's migration to Kombos started in the second half of the 1990s. He said:

“

PEOPLE WERE SITTING HERE WITHOUT A JOB. THE GOVERNMENT STOPPED HELPING THE COMMUNITY. THE PEOPLE WERE UNEDUCATED. WHAT THEY COULD DO? SITTING HERE WITHOUT ANY WORK? THEY SAID: 'LET ME MIGRATE TO KOMBO AND GO FIND A JOB'. [...] WHEN WE HAD THE RICE, YOU WERE NOT WORRIED [...] BUT NOW THE RICE FIELDS ARE NOT WORKING, WHERE DO YOU GET WORK? YOU SEE YOUR PARENTS, THEY DON'T HAVE FOOD TO EAT, OR THEY DON'T HAVE ANYTHING TO PUT ON TOP OF THE RICE. YOU ARE A BIG MAN AND YOU ARE JUST SITTING. YOU CANNOT SOLVE YOUR PROBLEMS. [...] INITIALLY THEY WENT TO KOMBOS, THEN THE "BACKWAY" STARTED IN 2014, 2015, 2016... WHEN THEY KILLED GADDAFI, THE "BACKWAY" OPENED IN LIBYA. THEN THE YOUTHS IN KOMBOS STARTED MOVING; WHEN THE YOUTHS HERE HEARD, THEY ALSO WENT. [...] IN MY COMPOUND 13 BOYS WENT. SOME CAME BACK; THEY DID NOT SUCCEED.²⁶

Brikama Ba's history casts light on one of the possible declination that the migration-development nexus has acquired locally. Inherited systems of representations and practices that organise economic activities (such as rice cultivation) and human mobility were adapted to integrate the externally designed Jahaly-Pacharr Project. Development fostered immigration and the socio-economic growth of local communities. When the intervention declined, and under difficult political circumstances, the villages of the area began to depend on the resources that their own people could mobilize by seeking jobs in the coastal areas or trying to travel the "backway". The idea of a development from below through migration thus sprouted out of the ashes of one of the largest development intervention at the national level.



4.2

MICROPOLITICS OF EXTRAVERSION

Brikama Ba's case exemplifies the autonomous and creative adaptation of the community to different forms of dependency on external resources. Local interlocutors call this trajectory 'local development through migration'. To be precise, they talk about the population growth of their community through immigration. This dynamic of dependency is replicated from the national level down to the family unit. The concept of "extraversion", formulated by Jean-François Bayart (1993: 21-24), helps to explain this process. For Bayart, "extraversion" is the ideological and practical role played by African political apparatuses as mediators of the relationships between the external world and local societies. Extraversion identifies the capacity of African political structures, institutions and elites to exploit actively their dependency on external actors (i.e. colonial powers, Cold War blocs, international agencies etc.) for different goals, such as the preservation of internal political stability, the reproduction of social hierarchies, and internal economic exploitation. Bayart strongly emphasises the fact that extraversion has implied the active inclusion and participation of Africans in global processes, with their own goals and strategies. Indeed, dependency "should not be dissociated from the concept of autonomy" (Bayart 1993: 27).

²⁵ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is collecting witnesses on the crimes of former president Jammeh and has revealed the critical issue of women's forced labour in the farmlands directly controlled by the dictator. Some of these farmlands were located in the Jahaly-Pacharr area (ICTJ 2019).

²⁶ Interview of 16 March 2020, Brikama Ba.



Bayart was originally speaking about a strategy of elite formation: the people who stand at the gateway between Africa and the rest of the world are the people that in specific historical periods have the power to dominate society. Through the redistribution of part of the resources obtained to clients, followers and kin, they reassert their position of superiority over others. Researchers who have applied “extraversion” to the study of international migrants’ home-context relations have used it to cast light on the emergence (and reproduction) of local elite, and on the politics of emulation put in place by other members of the community. Luca Ciabarrì’s (2011) analysis of the political economy of Somaliland’s international migrations tracked the impact of the diaspora and remittances at different levels of Somaliland society, from the architectural development of the capital city, Hargeisa, to business organisation and family daily life. The longstanding and massive emigration from Somali territories, combined with the collapse of state institutions in the late 1980s, has resulted in the spread of strategies of extraversion to the entire social body without the mediation of local elites or state institutions. In his perspective, extraversion is no longer a prerogative of specific functions and institutions entitled to act as intermediaries with external and transnational actors. The extraversion of the society has become a micro-political phenomenon that structures imaginaries and practices at all levels, starting from the individual, and then building up through the genealogical groups which are the stuff of Somali social life, and on up to the renewed state institutions of the Republic of Somaliland. This use of the concept of “extraversion” is well suited to describing the phase of massive emigration that The Gambia entered during the early 2000s. In the last two decades, local communities have consolidated and re-organised the forms of economic exploitation and social governance of the transnational networks engendered by different types of mobility. Households have developed new forms of control over the micro dynamics of community extraversion (Gaibazzi 2015: 134-158). In Kerewan and Mansajang, for instance, the material resources provided by migrants are vital economic assets. Migration shapes moral ideas about self-realisation and solidarity. Similarly to the Somaliland case described by Ciabarrì (2011), Kerewan is a community where the ‘projection’ of the household in the

diaspora supports social relationships at the ideological and practical level. Kerewan elders – in their double role of family heads and village decision-makers – have developed strategies to patrol and govern the relationship of dependency on the resources provided by migrants, at both the family and the village level. An infrastructure of moral discipline, to the implementation of which the entire social body contributes, tries to shape migrants’ conduct. Community dependency on remittances has grown constantly since the 1980s, together with a moral economy that organises forms of mutual support and the distribution of material resources. A set of moral norms inspires the mutual obligations between the individuals within the same network, for instance international migrants and their relatives at home.

An important example of these forms of control are public social events such as Quranic recitations, or *Gamo*. This kind of religious event has proliferated in The Gambia over the past two decades. During these events, people who moved outside the village feel obliged to return, visit their families, and attend collective prayer and convivial sessions that can last for two or three days. In discussion with Ismailou (pseudonym), a businessman from Kerewan who lives and works in Serrekunda, our research assistant mentioned his own experiences of Quranic recitations in this way: “It is like an assessment of the impact of migration on development”²⁷. During the Quranic recitations, village forums bring together local residents and the diaspora to discuss the main problems of the community; for example, the participants identify infrastructural gaps and commit to find the financial resources and organise the interventions. Ismailou recalled that Quranic recitations were first organised in Kerewan around 15 years ago:



THEY WERE CREATED TO MAKE PEOPLE COME BACK, TO SEE PEOPLE BACK, TO MAKE YOU THINK... BECAUSE THEY SAW PEOPLE GOING OUT.

smaïlou and our research assistant agreed on the fact that the main goal of the recitations is to refresh and cultivate the connection between the migrants – and also their children born outside the village – and their place of origin through the consolidation of personal relationships and networks of material support. Quranic recitations should therefore be considered as formalised social events through which the local community takes stock of the diaspora and tries to direct interventions. The conduct of the individual migrant is assessed by the entire community, starting with migrants themselves who evaluate their own performance and compare it with that of other migrants, under the evaluating eye of the entire village. Recitations are an arena to display local discourses on the nexus between individual and communal wellbeing, development and migration. The public character of this performance means that the recitations also have a regulative effect on the migrants and other people who settled outside the village. Recitations also enable the pragmatic coordination of the different strains of diaspora support for collective initiatives at the village level.

Communities are not organic wholes that speak with one voice. In Kerewan, discordant and critical perspectives expose the moral paradoxes generated by extraversion and the micro politics of the control of migrants. A shopkeeper based in Kerewan, whom we call here Ousman, affirmed that young people acknowledge the obligation to take part in networks of mutual support while deploying tactics to maintain some form of control over their contribution. Geographical mobility is not only a way to increase individual material support to the household and thus prominence in the moral economic network, but also a way to keep under control the requests of the network itself: the one who is not seen cannot be asked. The young man affirmed:



“

IN THE GAMBIAN CULTURE, TO SUCCEED AT HOME IS VERY DIFFICULT, IN ANY SECTOR. EVEN US, WE HAVE A BUSINESS HERE BUT WE ENCOUNTER SO MANY DIFFICULTIES. LIKE, IF I GO TO ANY OTHER REGION AND OPEN A SHOP LIKE THIS, I WOULD SEND A MONTHLY ALLOWANCE; IF I HAVE TO SEND 5.000 EVERY MONTH, THAT'S ALL I AM GOING TO SEND. BUT IF YOU ARE LIVING HERE, IN THE SOCIETY, PROBLEMS WILL COME AND YOU HAVE TO SOLVE THEM... EXCLUDING THE SACK OF RICE, THE DAILY FISH MONEY, THE CLOTHES²⁸... [...] WITH YOUR BUSINESS, EVERYBODY THINKS YOU HAVE, EVERYBODY WILL PUT THEIR HOPE ON YOU. YOU SEE... LESS THAN 30 MINUTES AGO ONE OF MY UNCLES CAME AND TOLD ME: 'I HAVE NO FISH MONEY TODAY'. SOMEONE COMES AND ASKS YOU: 'PLEASE, CAN YOU LEND ME THIS?'. HE IS A FAMILY MEMBER AND YOU CANNOT REFUSE. A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO I WAS CHECKING... I HAVE 24,000 [DALASI] GIVEN OUT AS LOANS... I KNOW THAT I WILL MANAGE TO GET 10,000 BACK, BUT I KNOW THAT I WILL LOSE 14,000. IN ONE YEAR, THESE ARE MY LOSSES BECAUSE OF THE FAMILY.²⁹

In both Brikama Ba and Kerewan, social and moral repertoires that govern the instrumental role of geographical mobility in relation to the well-being of the home contexts have emerged out of the two communities' experiences of the migration-development nexus. Kerewan's case also shows that the application of these repertoires is a source of tensions; young interlocutors criticise as oppressive the ideology that points to migration as the privileged path to contributing to the material reproduction of the household and the village. As Ousman's words suggest, the normative pressure to migrate and contribute to local development can also trigger the individual re-appropriation of mobility strategies as they are the only option to win some degree of autonomy over the support owed to the family network.

In Bakau, like in Brikama Ba, migration has become instrumental to the appropriation of external development interventions for local development purposes. Bakau is the first area of coastal Gambia where the facilities of the tourist industry were implanted during the 1960s. The historical proximity to European tourists has shaped a repertoire of informal hospitality practices that help local residents to obtain some kind of material support from the tourists. These benefits range from small

²⁸ Ousman meant that beyond providing food and other basic needs, there are always unexpected financial issues to be dealt with.

²⁹ Interview of 24 February, Kerewan.

tips to regular donations of money or goods, or to the sponsorship of legal international mobility through the establishment of long-lasting relationships between local residents and tourists. It is the presence of tourists, rather than possibility of employment in itself, that has played a crucial role in shaping both the expectations of young people and their individual trajectories of social and economic success. A man now living in the United Kingdom, born in Bakau in the early 1970s, described the town in these terms³⁰:



THE PEOPLE IN THE RURAL AREAS, YOU SEE, THE PLACE WHERE THEY SEEK FOR OPPORTUNITIES IS BAKAU. BAKAU IS A GATEWAY FOR SUCCESS, FOR INDEPENDENCE, FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT. THAT'S WHY I SAY THAT BAKAU HAS IMPACTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF MANY AREAS OF THE COUNTRY. IF YOU COME THROUGH BAKAU, YOU GET THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL TO EUROPE, MAKE SOME MONEY, HELP YOUR PEOPLE IN BASSE [FOR EXAMPLE]... DEVELOPMENT COMES. [...] WE [IN BAKAU] DON'T DEPEND ON THE GOVERNMENT, WE RATHER GO TO THE BEACH AND FISH, FOLLOW THE TOURISTS, GET OUR DAILY BREAD; WE ARE PEOPLE CONTENT WITH THE LITTLE THEY HAVE.

When sharing his life-history, he remarked:



AFTER HIGH SCHOOL, I WAS OFFERED A JOB IN A BANK AND, BECAUSE I AM FROM BAKAU, I ASKED THEM HOW MUCH MONEY THEY WERE GOING TO PAY ME. IN THOSE DAYS... THEY TOLD ME 400 DALASI, WHICH WAS LIKE 5 POUNDS AND I TOLD THEM: 'NO, WHERE I AM FROM I CAN GET THAT IN A DAY'. SO I WENT TO THE BEACH, I WORKED IN A HOTEL, I WAS A POOL BOY [...] I WAS CLEANING THE POOL, HELPING THE TOURISTS, GOING OUT WITH THEM. I MET A WOMAN THERE, WE MARRIED, THEN I WENT TO GERMANY.

During our conversation, the interlocutor admitted that the tourist sector has drastically changed compared to the early 1990s, when he started to work in a hotel. The activities organised by the hotels and

the opportunities to interact with the tourists have sharply diminished. Through the confiscation of hotels Jammeh's regime caused a deterioration in the quality of hospitality services. Nowadays, tourism is a declining economic resource. Yet the mobility of tourists towards The Gambia has triggered a second level of mobility-for-development, that of local young men to Europe (Wagner and Yamba 1986)³¹. Past development interventions in the tourist sector have thus deeply influenced the economic reproduction of the community, and the international mobility of Bakau's young people, who closely monitor relationships with incoming tourists. Alieu (pseudonym), a young man working in a bar along the coastal road crossing Bakau, offered to assist as a guide a tourist from Spain during his visit in Bakau. The two spent some days together. One morning Alieu was extremely nervous. He had just been fired by the bar owner because of an argument with a police officer. According to Alieu, the quarrel was caused by other young men that offer their services to tourists, or bumsters. These young men had reported him to the police officer. For some days, they had been provoking him by saying that he was prostituting himself with foreigners:



THEY ARE JEALOUS OF ME BECAUSE I AM WORKING A LOT WITH THE TOUBAB [WHITE PEOPLE] AND THEY THINK I AM GETTING MONEY OUT OF IT. THEY WERE ALREADY JEALOUS WHEN I WAS HIRED BY THE BAR BECAUSE I RECEIVED THE ID CARD ALLOWING ME TO WORK IN THE TOURIST AREA, HERE. I HAVE THIS CARD AND THE POLICE CANNOT DO ANYTHING TO ME IF I TALK TO A TOUBAB. YOU ARE NOT THE FIRST ONE I HAVE MET IN THIS SEASON AND THE OTHER BOYS WANT TO KEEP ME OUT OF THIS. THEY WANT ME ONLY TO WORK AS A CLEANER IN THE BAR. [...] THEY ARE DOING THIS TO ME BECAUSE THEY KNOW THAT MY FAMILY IS NOT HERE: MY FATHER IS IN BRIKAMA.

Alieu tried to win his employer's support but he refused, saying that the hostility against Alieu was clearly too widespread: "I am sorry, but I do not want to have anything to do with that." Alieu was desperate and angry; he decided to go back to his father in Brikama for a few days. He never returned to Bakau. His vulnerable position in the local network of informal tourist guides was related to the fact that he had arrived in Bakau only eight months before, after many years abroad. First, he went to Senegal where he became a skilled tailor, then came back, tried to reach Europe through Libya, and left Libya to spend a few months in Algeria. His father was from Bakau, though he moved to Brikama when Alieu was a child. The unsuccessful migration trajectory put Alieu in an extremely vulnerable situation, as he repeatedly admitted. When he returned from Algeria he had nothing:

³⁰ Interview of 7 February 2020.

³¹ Reading these encounters critically, Paulla Ebron (1997) had already cautioned against the risk of a merely utilitarian reading of the relationships between Gambian young men and female tourists. "Travel trajectories" are at the same time "trajectories of desire in the transnational space", which point to "different kinds of travels and their possibilities and limitations" (Ebron 1997: 242). "Power differences" – Ebron maintained (1997: 242) – "are inscribed in different configurations of mobility". Although focused on the power imbalance between Gambians and tourists, Ebron's remark can work as a pointer to the stratification of different regimes of mobility (and immobility) within the country.

“

I ONLY HAD A PAIR OF TROUSERS, I WAS DIRTY AND HUNGRY. NOBODY WANTED TO HELP ME. PEOPLE CALLED ME “CRAZY BOY” ON THE STREETS, UNTIL FINALLY THE OWNER OF A TAILORING WORKSHOP OFFERED TO LET ME WORK FOR HIM.³²

A few days after Alieu’s departure for Brikama, a man in his late 30s working with the tourists commented on the events:

“

HE IS A STRANGER. [...] HE IS A GOOD BOY BUT HE SPENT TOO MANY YEARS AWAY AND FORGOT MANDINKA [LANGUAGE]. SOMETIMES WHEN HE SPEAKS, HE MIXES IT WITH WOLOF”. [...] ALIEU IS A PROFESSIONAL TAILOR AND HE SHOULD DO THAT. WHAT IS THE POINT OF FOLLOWING THE TOURISTS? [...] ACTUALLY, I THINK HE WAS FOLLOWING THE TOURISTS BECAUSE HE STILL WANTS TO GO TO EUROPE AT ANY COST. HE TRIED BUT HAD TO COME BACK. HE THINKS TOURISTS CAN HELP HIM.³³

By focusing on Alieu’s way of speaking, the interlocutor was stressing his family’s foreign origins. His paternal grandfather was a Senegalese immigrant in Bakau. When he died, Alieu’s father and his brothers were always at odds; the compound was too congested and Alieu’s father decided to move to Brikama. Thus, various factors made Alieu unfit to interact with tourists, in the eyes of the young men of Bakau. He himself believed to be marginalised as an unsuccessful migrant. Moreover, not being in town, his father could not stand by him; finally, Alieu did not belong to the Mandinka families of Bakau’s first settlers. The limited number of tourists in Bakau, compared to the past and to other coastal areas of The Gambia, triggers competition and intensified control of access to the economic resources they can provide. In the case of Alieu, his condition of unsuccessful return migrant intersected with the Senegalese background of his family: this old identity became a tool for exclusion in a context of declining local resources. In Bakau, as the other four research sites, people do not consider immigration into the community, international emigrations, returns and the transnational relationships with either the village diaspora or tourists to be the cumulative result of individual choices and acts. Different kinds of geographical mobility are shaped – and in turn shape – the collective

discourse on local development. As such, they require and activate a local governance of mobility, which changes across time and adapts to new situations. In the heyday of the Jahaly-Pacharr project, Brikama Ba accommodated the inflow of immigrant labour by drawing on the pattern of host-stranger relationships³⁴ that governed the commercial history of the Gambia River in the age of the Atlantic slave trade and colonial commercial agriculture as well. Today, Bakau youths rely on the never-complete assimilation of immigrants into the village families of first settlers in order to govern access to the meagre resources brought by tourism.



4.3

THE SPECIFICITY OF THE “BACKWAY”

Local representations and activations of the migration development nexus are dynamic. After the 2000s, attempts to enter Europe without a regular visa, and their positive and negative consequences on home contexts, have opened local debates on the recent historical phase of the “backway”. An elder from the village of Kerewan underlined that although people have always emigrated, the last ten years marked a different phase:

“

THESE BOYS [THE LAST TEN YEARS’ MIGRANTS] BUILT HOUSES; ANY ELDER WHO WENT TO MECCA DID SO THROUGH THEM... BECAUSE AGRICULTURE CANNOT FEED YOU AND BUILD YOUR HOUSE. ANY NICE BUILDING YOU SEE WAS BUILT BY THESE BOYS. MAYBE A FEW WENT THROUGH VISAS BUT MOST OF THEM WENT THROUGH THE “BACKWAY” AFTER THE GADDAFI WAR [MEANING AFTER 2011]³⁵.

³² The episode happened in mid-January 2020.

³³ Interview of 27 January 2020.

³⁴ These relationships are affiliation linkages with local residents that allowed migrant workers access to land for agricultural and residential purposes. They resembled the arrangements which had regulated slave labour within households: the migrant had to work for a number of days on the household’s collective fields, and what time was left on individual fields (Swindell and Jeng 2006). The final step of the stranger’s assimilation was the allocation of land for permanent settlement and marriage with local women.

³⁵ Interview of 23 February 2020, Kerewan.

In the last ten years, the Central Mediterranean route through Libya experienced a rapid increase (2011-2013) and then decline (2017-2020). During this span of time, it became the dominant way through which Gambian youths tried to reach Europe. The first difference with earlier histories of migration is the size of the “backway”. Elders, middle-aged parents who lost their sons in the “backway”, youth activists, migrants-to-be and returnees all agree on this point. A young man in Kerewan reported that, with a group of friends, he had once tried to count the people they knew who took the “backway”. They reached the conclusion that at least 310 persons were in Europe.



EIGHTY PERCENT OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING IN THIS COMMUNITY HAVE ALREADY MIGRATED. I AM ONE HUNDRED PERCENT SURE OF THIS BECAUSE ALL THE YOUTHS I GREW UP WITH HAVE MIGRATED... MY CLOSE FRIENDS, MY CLASSMATES... MOST OF THEM HAVE TRAVELLED³⁶.

The physical and social infrastructure of mobility and the practices of migrants are a second cluster of elements that for people mark the “backway” historical specificity. Since the early 2000s, infrastructural investment by the Jammeh government has gradually changed mobility patterns, especially in rural communities, and facilitated commercial exchanges in the regional markets. The construction in 2000 of the Kerewan bridge, the refurbishing first of the North and then of the South Bank highway in the second half of the 2000s, road construction in the Upper River Region in the mid-2010s (especially the highway linking Basse to the Senegalese town of Velingara) have affected and continued to transform the economy of villages like Kerewan and Mansajang. Transport infrastructure has facilitated internal mobility towards the coastal areas, and faster and cheaper transport to the main urban centres of West African (and ECOWAS) countries. According to our interlocutors, international bus lines started to operate after 2005; they connect the coastal urban areas and other towns of The Gambia with cities such as Agadez and Niamey that are intermediate stages in the trip to Libya and the Mediterranean shores.

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Some return migrants reported that reaching Niger, the last step before Libya, was the easiest part of the journey. Many migrants managed to complete it by relying on personal savings. In some cases, Gambians already settled in other West African countries provided them with information and shelter in exchange for labour. While some interlocutors, located almost entirely in Kerewan, provided personal experiences of collaborative decisions or even active family encouragement to travel the “backway”, many others, both in Kerewan and Mansajang, remarked on the habit young individuals had developed of leaving for Libya without informing either their parents or relatives, sometimes after having appropriated family resources. Migration trajectories of the 1980s and 90s were extensively discussed among the members of the households. Post 2011 migrants have often taken their relatives by surprise without sharing their mobility plans in advance. They informed the family just before entering Libya when they needed support to meet human smugglers’ requests for money, sometimes while suffering threats, torture and unbelievable violence. In the Libyan arena where anybody – a bandit, a soldier, a commoner – can kill you at any moment, family assistance, which is an element of continuity with earlier histories of migration, had to be mobilised swiftly and under direct threat to life in order to cope with the rules of the trafficking hub opened by the collapse of Libyan state institutions. According to a young man from Mansajang, at the peak of the “backway”, people in the neighbouring villages sold standard size plots for developing a residential building for ridiculously low prices, as they were forced to collect money quickly to help their children.

³⁶Interview of 24 February 2020, Kerewan. These considerations are confirmed by the official numbers of arrivals in Europe, mostly Italy, through the Central Mediterranean route that several institutions’ reports present. See FFM West Africa (2017) and Faal (2020).



PEOPLE DID NOT LIKE TO SELL THEIR LAND BUT SINCE THAT PERIOD, THEY HAD TO SELL IT... [...] YOU COULD SEE A PERSON WHO HAD PLENTY OF LAND AND WAS NOT READY TO SELL, BUT [OTHER] PEOPLE WANTED TO DEVELOP THAT AREA. BECAUSE OF THIS MIGRATION ISSUE, THEY STARTED TO SELL LAND³⁷.

The last 15 years of transnational migration are also related to other transformations in the field sites. Both in Kerewan and Mansajang, the networks of material support that link the village and its diaspora have been revised. The expansion of village diasporas has triggered new efforts to assemble community platforms, usually called *kafo*, which collect funds to invest for public purposes. In the last couple of years, the 'Kerewan One Family' *kafo* has covered the compound tax due to the area council for the entire community, met the expenses of important community events and funded local schools. Migrants' contributions are an arena of contested representations: young men in Kerewan condemned the widespread exaltation of remittances and the devaluation of the economic efforts of the youths that stay put. In the last ten years, two opposite trends have challenged local representations of the migration and development nexus. A number of households suffered tremendous human and material losses caused by human trafficking. On this negative impact, everybody agrees. But under the circumstances of the "backway", villages and their diaspora have worked hard to organise and coordinate the allocation of resources for local development, for example through *kafo*s that pool together migrants' and residents' contributions. People are aware that these two opposite trends are often the prelude to further vulnerability for individuals, households and communities. Whether aware or not of their young members' plans to travel the "backway", family networks of mutual support have invested a lot in the process. It is still to be seen whether the remittances of the diaspora that has emerged out of the "backway" will truly be able to consolidate the transnational network of material support that sustains the local development of both families and villages.

4.4.1 DECONSTRUCTING MIGRATION CHOICES

On the ground, the migration-development nexus is key to uncovering a complicated pattern of vulnerabilities. Some are inherited, others are new, at both the individual and communal level. Returnees and potential migrants do not use the lexicon of choice to describe their past (or expected) trajectories of geographical mobility. They rely instead on the language of "drivers", which migration studies coined in the past and

tries today to overcome with a more nuanced conceptual apparatus³⁸. Local migration "theory" reads the decision to migrate in relation to micro or macro factors that constrain the possibility of a 'decent' life for the individual and his/her own social network. Family crises such as the sudden death of parents or family breadwinners are put on the top list of migration drivers. Of course, people make their own evaluations and decisions, but these two processes are not explained in terms of choices: these drivers take priority over individual ambitions or desires. Dudu (pseudonym), a return migrant from Kerewan, reported that on the way home he argued with his family members, who were annoyed that he had left for Libya without notice. After having reached Senegal through the support of IOM, and before entering The Gambia, he called his brother:



I ASKED HIM TO GIVE ME MY MOTHER'S NUMBER STRAIGHT AWAY. THIS IS HOW HE ANSWERED: 'YOU, BEFORE ASKING FOR YOUR MOTHER'S NUMBER, WHERE ARE YOU? DID YOU KNOW WHAT YOU LEFT HERE? YOUR MOTHER NEVER SLEPT, ASKING ABOUT YOU ALL THE DAY. WHEN YOU COME BACK HERE I WILL PUNISH YOU: YOU TRAVELLED WITHOUT EVEN INFORMING ME. I AM YOUR BROTHER. WHY DID YOU NOT INFORM ME?'.

Dudu apparently replied: '*You know, this seemed to be what God had decided: I had to go, I had to go*'.³⁹ The decision is thus positioned out of the reach of an individual's will: external factors turn the "backway" into the main option. Before departing, Dudu had seen various opportunities closing in front of him. He had to leave school when he was twelve because the family could not meet the expenses. Then he started an apprenticeship as a carpenter in Kerewan but his boss became sick and advised him to go to the coastal urban areas in order to complete his apprenticeship. In the meantime, Dudu lost his father and felt a strong moral obligation to support his family. His boss used advance payments on the workshop contracts to travel the "backway". Other colleagues ended up in Europe as well.

The trajectory of Siaka, a young man from Mansajang, is similar to Dudu's. Siaka reached the coastal areas of The Gambia after having lost his father at a very young age. He made a failed attempt to travel the "backway", about which he did not like to talk. In 2020, he had a permanent job with QCell, one of the telecommunication companies that operate in The Gambia, and lived in Mansajang:

³⁷ Interview of 12 February 2020, Mansajang.

³⁸ The diffusion of the concept of "drivers of migration" in migration studies accelerated during the 2010s and responded to the intention of distancing the analysis from the too strong and mechanical connections between phenomena based on the identification of "causes of migration" (Carling and Collins 2018: 920).

³⁹ Interview of 25 February 2020, Kerewan.

“

SOMETIMES IT'S HARD. MY FATHER WAS TAKING ALL THE PRESSURE; NOW MY FATHER DIED, AND I AM TAKING ALL THE PRESSURE... MY MOTHER IS HERE... THAT'S WHY EVERY DAY I STRUGGLE. [...] QCELL IS A MONTHLY PAYMENT. MONTHLY PAYMENT ARE NOT ENOUGH TO SETTLE YOU. THEY CANNOT SATISFY A A FAMILY MAN. SOMETIMES I HAVE TO ASK MY MOTHER FOR 25 OR 50 DALASI, AND I HAVE TO GO TO THE BUSH TO GET MEAT⁴⁰.

Micro-crises that disrupt the household's economic routines and reposition individuals therein triggered Dudu and Siaka's travel attempts, although Dudu was a younger brother trying to carve out his own space in the family network led by his older brother, while Siaka suddenly found himself in the position of family man. Looked at closely, individual trajectories are extremely varied. The common thread is the experience of a "vital juncture" that breaks the pre-existing routine of existence (Johnson-Hanks 2002). Individual micro-crises may intersect with local processes of dispossession, which are in turn ushered by broader regional, interregional and international dynamics. Among the most visible development results of the investments made in the country by Gambians abroad is the mushrooming of villas and compounds in the areas along the coast. This has fed a real estate market that interacts with communities that were originally agricultural and fishing-based, such as Gunjur. Gunjur's youths blame the participation of the village elders (and of household leaders) in this process of land grabbing, which shrinks the village land originally allocated for farming or for the construction of new compounds. Individual owners can sell their plots of land but the elders of the descent group control the bulk of transactions with real estate agencies. Young men of the village lament their exclusion from decision-making processes that affect their future. During a spontaneous focus group, one of them gave voice to his frustration in this way:

“

IN THE PAST, PEOPLE INHERITED A LOT OF LAND FROM THEIR PARENTS. THIS DOES NOT HAPPEN OFTEN NOW. [...] THE YOUTH WILL SOON LACK AREAS TO FARM AND BUILD. [...] IF THE YOUTH DON'T HAVE THE SPACE, THEY ARE GONNA GO. THAT'S WHAT IS CAUSING THIS YOUTH MOVEMENT FROM ONE PLACE TO ANOTHER... NO JOB, NO SPACE... THE YOUTH MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF THE DESCENT GROUP SO THAT MANY MISTAKES CAN BE AVOIDED⁴¹.



Kerewan's agricultural economy has experienced cyclical crises since the 1970s with repeated experiences of harvests shrinking or failing altogether. Rainfall scarcity ruined the 2019 harvests of groundnuts and millet. Even when harvests are good, several households can sustain themselves only for two or three months with the income generated. Commercialisation is the critical phase of any agricultural venture, as was clearly underlined by Kebbeh (pseudonym), one of the local elders belonging to the families of first settlers. Farmers try to bring their groundnuts to the "Seccos", that is the local branches of the National Food Security Processing and Marketing Corporation, which since 2015 have monopolised the purchase and export of Gambian groundnuts. But often, they have to find an alternative solution. The Corporation's shortcomings encourage smuggling into Senegal:

“

EVEN THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T BUY OUR GROUNDNUTS. IF YOU TRY TO TALK MORE ABOUT THIS ISSUE THEY SEE YOU AS OPPOSITION OR THEY SAY THAT YOU ARE CRITICISING THE GOVERNMENT. BUT IT IS A FACT THAT EVEN THIS YEAR ALL OUR GROUNDNUTS WERE BOUGHT BY SENEGAL: IT MEANS THAT WE ARE PRODUCING FOR SENEGAL. [...] SENEGALESE BUYERS OFFER MORE MONEY... THOSE WHO SOLD TO SECCO GOT LOWER PRICES AND THEY ARE STILL WAITING TO RECEIVE THEIR MONEY. THAT'S WHY A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE DON'T ENGAGE IN FARMING AND WANT TO GO, EVEN BY THE "BACKWAY"⁴².

⁴⁰ Interview of 9 February 2020, Mansajang.

⁴¹ Interview of 5 February 2020, Gunjur.

⁴² Interview of 28 February 2020, Kerewan.

people don't engage in farming and want to go, even by the "backway". For Kebbeh, groundnut commercialisation is a crucial object at stake in the construction of legitimacy of the post-Jammeh national political elites. Undoubtedly, between 2019 and the first months of 2020, the issue was a reason for discontent with the new Barrow government. Kebbeh underlined both the long-term negative macroeconomic effects of the leakage of groundnuts into Senegal's market, and the direct connection between the inefficiency of groundnut commercialisation and young people's mobility. At least for Kerewan families of first-settlers, land is not in short supply. Entire groups of siblings have left for coastal urban areas around the capital city or the "backway" and there are huge portions of abandoned farmlands to recuperate. Ten of Kebbeh's children and nephews have left the village and the household has not enough labour to farm all the fields, which are traditionally under their custody. Both Gunjur and Kerewan residents understand the youth's aspirations of migration in the overall crisis of the agricultural sector, which is a process that has been underway since the 1970s at least. But in Gunjur, the presence of a real-estate market invites residents (and family elders in particular) to cash in agricultural lands, while in the case of Kerewan the weakness of Gambian commercialisation chains (whether public or private) discourages both the women involved in gardening and the men who have continued to invest their resources and labour in groundnut cultivation.

4.4.2 VULNERABILITY, RISK AND THE "BACKWAY"

Issa (pseudonym), a businessman from Kerewan based in the coastal town of Serrekunda, showed no hesitation in describing mobility as the result of well-considered evaluations and decisions; but, quite interestingly, he was not referring to his own journey but to those of two younger brothers whom he actively encouraged and supported in their "backway" journey to Italy. The act of evaluating and deciding was openly acknowledged as a concerted process that involved the interlocutor and the migrants-to-be (but excluded the mother of one of the migrants). This interviewee deliberately assumed responsibility for his junior siblings' mobility as part of his duties as family head and manager of the familial network of mutual support. Issa, who is an internal migrant himself, provides the bulk of the financial support for the main necessities of his mother, co-mothers and younger siblings in Kerewan. He finances a monthly allowance, the horticultural activities of the family's women and extra funding for unexpected expenses (for example, medical bills):



TO BE HONEST, I DID NOT LIKE [THE IDEA OF HIS BROTHERS' "BACKWAY" MIGRATION] BUT THAT WAS THE TREND AMONG THE YOUTHS. BUT ON SECOND THOUGHTS, I CONSENTED IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT, SINCE THE WHOLE FAMILY DEPENDS ON ME, AND THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO HELP SOMEONE IN THE FAMILY THAT WOULD LESSEN THE BURDEN ON ME, WHY NOT?⁴³

Organising the departure of his younger siblings was thus a strategy of intra-household economic diversification, which in the long term will alleviate his excessive financial burden. The financial investment he made for the two migrants is not a loan although he definitely expects that the brothers will reciprocate his support when they are able to do so. It was a risk. For some time after their departure, Issa did not have enough funds to pay his suppliers and it was only thanks to his solid reputation that he could take merchandise on credit and repay suppliers after selling it. The previous sections of this report showed that vulnerability is part and product of the localised histories of organising the transformation of external resources into local development through the governance of different forms of mobility: a trajectory that can be conceptualised as a history of extraversion. The last ten years of "backway" migration configured a new phase of uncertainty about this effort. Dudu, Siaka and Issa represented their current situation as a set of micro and macro factors that define individual and structural configurations of vulnerability. Their words frame the response to vulnerability as the assumption of a risk. Risk taking is a social act as it is associated with specific social and gender roles⁴⁴. Young men claim for themselves the responsibility for coping with the structural vulnerability of their family networks (often against the will of the family members). Issa's younger brothers put their lives at stake by embarking on the "backway" and Issa risked (and still risks) losing his business by investing his money. Family heads, such as Siaka and Issa, believe that they are called to lead the negotiation and take the decision on the distribution of risk within the family⁴⁵. From this point of view, the migration-development nexus opens a window on the processes through which vulnerability, risks and gains are socially evaluated in the effort to intercept and transform external resources through the ideology and practice of migration.

⁴³ Interview of 6 March 2020, Serrekunda.

⁴⁴ Maria Hernandez-Carretero and Jorgen Carling have analysed the dynamic of risk taking amongst the 2000s pirogue migrants from Senegal, and underlined the gendered dimension of the general aspirations to migration and decision-making about one specific form of transnational migration, i.e. the dangerous ocean travel (Hernandez-Carretero and Carling 2012).

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Paolo Gaibazzi's detailed analysis of young men's hesitancy about becoming household head in the village of Sabi, Upper River Region (Gaibazzi 2015: 134-158).

CONCLUSION



The collection of local interlocutors' definitions of development, and the analytical effort to ground them in the field sites' history of economic transformations and trace their connections and disconnections with migration phenomena, has led to one element being highlighted: the concrete manifestations of development are today predominantly associated with migration. On several occasions the researchers started the interviews by asking the interlocutors to name the ongoing development interventions in their communities. Many of them hesitated, mumbled the acronym of some NGO, hastily alluded to extemporaneous relief aid provided by government agencies after unfortunate harvests or remembered the fasts and the painful failure of past development interventions, such as the Jahaly-Pacharr project or Bakau's artisanal fishery. The youth targeting schemes such as YEP and Tekki Fii were not seen as remarkable examples of post-Jammeh development interventions, especially outside the coastal urban areas. The most common use amongst different age groups of the term "development" is in relation to construction or infrastructure expansion at the household and the village level. And both processes of expansion were indicated as depending on the migrants' material contributions. This dependency was described as increasing during the past two decades, but has deep historical roots. Two middle-aged men from the village of Mansajang commented to the researchers on the migration trajectories that started in the 1980s or 90s, and one of their main criteria for classifying successful and unsuccessful trajectories was whether the migrants "had developed their place". From a historical point of view, Gambian strategies of geographical mobility have consolidated as a way to maximise the benefits of the inflow of external resources, such as during rice schemes in Brikama Ba or the successful expansion of the tourist industry in Bakau, as well as in response to micro and macro crises (i.e. the redistribution of roles and responsibilities in a family unit, the longstanding decline of agricultural income and the political repression under Jammeh). These results challenge a national perspective on migration, both for scholars and for policy makers. Even in a small country like The Gambia, the phenomenon of migration is consistent across the nation only if we look at it through the lens of statistics, which give us a picture of periods of increase or decrease, or from the perspective of a limited number of factors that are eminently Gambian, such as Jammeh's repressive regime. The field of action and the scope

of both research and policymaking needs instead to develop beyond and below the level of the nation (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) in order to account for transnational connections, such as the consolidation after 2011 of a continental infrastructure of mobility centred on the Libyan human trafficking hub. It has to consider local contexts structured by specific demographic, social, economic and political processes. The national bias does not help to clarify the intertwining of migration with local histories of social and economic reproduction, and of development itself.

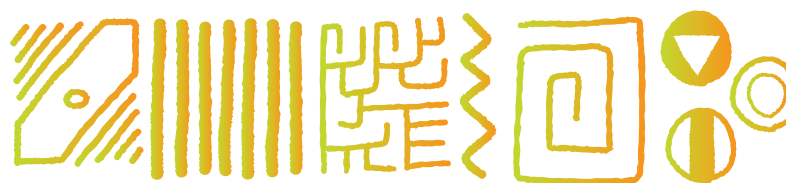
As reported in the introduction, development interventions in The Gambia have a history of being co-opted into the political elite's strategies of promoting consent and repressing dissent, community by community. This history has contributed to consolidating localised strategies aimed at coping with the influence of external political institutions and actors. Before, during and after Jammeh's brutal control over the distribution of investment in the country, development interventions have been the channels through which political influences penetrate specific sectors of society or circumscribed contexts, and as such are perceived by local actors. For instance, numerous young men interviewed in the field sites were annoyed by the youth targeting schemes such as Tekki Fii and YEP and labelled them as mere instruments of the EU's political agenda of stopping transnational migration. But development interventions have a second political dimension, in the sense that, while being reappropriated by individuals and groups, they become instrumental to political dynamics controlled by the development brokers or the beneficiaries themselves. The history of the Brikama Ba community's creative appropriation of an external development intervention and then their adaptation to development marginalisation during the Jammeh years proves, for instance, that local political elites and social networks developed rich experience of how to manage a highly volatile relationship with resources and political influences coming from outside. Analogous considerations are inspired by the past and present local appropriations of Bakau's tourist industry. Numerous development interventions seem to pay scarce attention to the great capacity that these repertoires have to influence their implementation.

This rigidity in the interaction with the repertoires of experiences, knowledge and expectations of local development brokers and

⁴⁶ Interviews conducted between 11 and 13 March 2020, Mansajang.

beneficiaries also manifests in the individualistic approach of much research, policy making and development interventions in the field of migration. This approach assumes that the basic beneficiary category of the project is the individual, an abstract unit which allows the development intervention to maintain a high degree of standardisation within the entire country, or even the broader region. Projects such as Tekki Fii, and their slogans – “You can make it here” – pursue the double objective of raising awareness in young Gambians of the risks of the “backway” and of enhancing their individual talents, abilities, skills and other personal assets. But they forget that what we call “the individual” is a social and historical construction at variance with contexts. The Gambian youth openly criticise inherited visions of how they are expected to contribute to local development, as was made clear by many of our interlocutors, but they also plan and assemble their life trajectories, including migration ones, in relation to their position within specific social, economic and affective networks that directly or indirectly participate in the negotiation of aspirations, imagination and action. This does not mean that individuals are the passive executors of corporate agendas. Travelling the “backway”, as much as “making it at home”, stands somewhere in between the evaluation of the vulnerabilities that face both individuals and networks and the assumption of the risks ahead. In the process, those whom we target as individuals see themselves as positionalities in the making, knots whose maturation coincides with their potential contribution to the reproduction and expansion of the networks of mutual support that are the stuff of Gambian society, such as households or village associations.

In the organisation of development interventions, setting up huge and centralised management and logistic apparatuses, broad advertising campaigns and slogans that target standardised categories of beneficiaries does not seem to be an approach which is capable of effectively engaging context-specific repertoires and networks of resource production and distribution. This approach ignores their historical depth and the fact that they are dynamic arenas pervaded by tensions and competing points of view. Gunjur’s young interlocutor quoted above strongly disagreed with decision-making bodies controlled by the village elders who have permanently alienated large portions of land, selling it to real estate investors. In Kerewan, a context where the ideology of promoting youth mobility in order to consolidate familial networks of mutual support is widespread, some local interlocutors underlined the fact that mobility trajectories can be re-appropriated by young migrants as a way to win some degree of autonomy in managing their financial contributions to these networks. The centralisation of development interventions management, the standardisation of categories of beneficiaries and communication campaigns do not match these dynamic arenas of inherited and contested repertoires. External interventions into specific sectors of the society or geographical contexts will always be re-appropriated by different categories of subjects involved, in ways that cannot be entirely foreseen. However, agile and flexible planning and implementation of interventions can interact in a more sophisticated way with expectations, strategies and networks of individuals and groups. Agility and flexibility not only facilitate the pragmatic proximity between the intervention and the networks’ historically inherited capacity to maximise the impact of external resources (remittances, investments, infrastructures etc.), but can also transform development projects into platforms through which different positions (such as gender roles or age groups) have the opportunity to negotiate inclusive participation in the processes of change.



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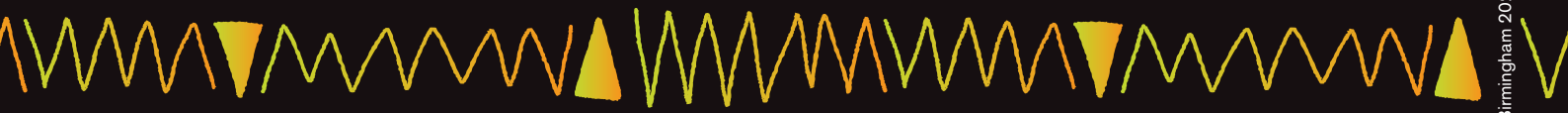
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